

BROTHERHOOD OF ST. LAURENCE
67 BRUNSWICK STREET, FITZROY 3065
~~ABBOTT~~

CLAIMANTS OR CLIENTS?

Welfare recipients' perception of the service delivery
from the Australian Department of Social Security and
the Commonwealth Employment Service.

Brotherhood of St Laurence -

Family Centre Project Research
Submission to the Royal Commis-
sion on Australian Government
Administration.

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THIS REPORT WAS PRODUCED BY THE SOCIAL ISSUES DEPARTMENT
AND THE FAMILY CENTRE PROJECT OF THE BROTHERHOOD OF ST
LAURENCE.

IT IS THE RESULT OF THE COMBINED EFFORTS OF:

David Griffiths - Social Policy Officer
Jan Salmon - Family Centre Project Research Worker
Gladys Shears - Family Centre Project Member
Pauline Windler - Family Centre Project Member
Maureen Wolf - Family Centre Project Member

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2. INTRODUCTION

This research study is concerned with the experience of a group of low-income families and their contact with the Department of Social Security and the Commonwealth Employment Service (C.E.S.).¹

The Royal Commission on Government Administration had indicated its interest in grass roots participation in Government Administration and to this end the Social Issues Department and the Family Centre Project of the Brotherhood of St Laurence submitted a research proposal (Appendix A) which was duly accepted.

We present the results of this research and in doing so would like to emphasise that the research results have been separated into two essentially distinct sections. The first section reports the results of the survey and the second section examines the implications of the results.

The first section presents and discusses the questionnaire (Appendix B) administered by Family Centre members to their fellow members. The results present a profile of the relationship between the families and the Department of Social Security and the C.E.S. The families were able to insightfully specify the problems, but they were not able to formulate solutions to the problems. This does not make the problems any less valid, but rather places the onus on the public service to acknowledge deficiencies in its service to the public and to take appropriate action to overcome these deficiencies. The problems described present a criticism of the failure of the Department of Social Security and the C.E.S. to be sufficiently responsive to the public.

The second section provides an interpretative framework for the questionnaire results. For over two years, the families have been involved in an experimental program conducted by the Brotherhood of St Laurence. The history and development of this Project is crucial to an understanding of the families' situation and has provided us with a larger perspective than would otherwise be provided by questionnaire results alone (Appendix C.) Without departing substantially from the questionnaire results, this section builds on this larger perspective.

Our belief arising from this research is that the public cannot be served if the public service is unaccountable, inaccessible and non-participatory.

REFERENCES

1. For a previous discussion on the experience of the families with the Department of Social Security and the C.E.S. :

SALMON, Jan. Resources for poor families: an experimental income supplement scheme, Australian Government Commission of Inquiry into Poverty, Canberra, 1974.

C.E.S. p. 74 - 76.

Department of Social Security p. 91 - 94.

David Griffiths,
Jan Salmon

July, 1975.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations that follow are of two kinds. First, there are those recommendations which arise out of the survey results. Second, there are those recommendations which we as researchers see as necessary and desirable. This latter group of recommendations have been formulated on the basis of the families' attitudes and experiences, the perspective and context of the Family Centre Project and an extensive reading of relevant literature. A detailed argument for the recommendations is presented in the Conclusion (see p. 80 - 90).

The families' recommendations were for :

- (a) Increased pensions and benefits;
- (b) More helpful and polite staff;
- (c) Reduction of waiting periods for pensions and benefits;
- (d) More privacy;
- and (e) Helping people to find jobs.

Out of the research and an assessment of the problems experienced by the families, we make the following recommendations :

1. Individual claimants should have access to their own files and the opportunity to photocopy these files.
2. Staff training programs need to be carefully examined in terms of their effectiveness.
3. Future research activities by government departments with low-income groups should accept the need for claimant participation in designing and conducting the research.
4. The Social Security Appeals Tribunal should be expanded to allow for speedier determination of appeals and the Tribunal should be given the power to determine appeals instead of having to refer their decisions to the Director-General of Social Security for determination.
5. There needs to be acceptance of a 'public right' to know, not only to know about decisions but also to participate in the making of decisions.

6. The Welfare Rights program should be continued and expanded to provide the nucleus of a series of claimant advisory boards attached to the Regional, State and Federal offices of the Department of Social Security and the C.E.S.
7. There needs to be a clear policy decision about :
 - (i) The accountability of government administration and statutory agencies; and
 - (ii) If accountability to claimants is accepted as policy then there is a need to establish mechanisms by which this accountability can be assured and implemented.

4. - METHODOLOGY

Research Rationale -

The members of the Family Centre Project have had extensive contact with some Australian Government Departments, especially the Department of Social Security and the C.E.S., which is part of the Department of Labor and Immigration. Indeed these families are frequently dependent on these Departments for their income. Thus the Family Centre Project offers a unique opportunity to gather claimants' opinions regarding service delivery. Claimant evaluation is frequently overlooked and even when it is undertaken, it is difficult to gain an honest opinion - many claimants fear the repercussions of criticising a department.

Sample -

In January, 1975, the Family Centre Project had a membership of 63 families. Because family composition varies from week to week, it is not possible to specify exactly the nature of the sample. However, usually 50% of the families are fatherless families who are receiving pensions. The other 50% is composed of primarily two-parent families. There have been isolated cases of motherless families occurring, although only one family has remained so for longer than six months. The two-parent families either have a pensioner head or are families where the male head is a potential worker. Because most of the men are intermittent workers, they oscillate to some extent between receiving wages and unemployment benefits.

It was planned to interview a representative from all the families. The 63 families were randomly assigned to three female interviewers, who were also Family Centre members, in an attempt to minimise bias because of friendship patterns, etc. However, the sample was strongly biased by the fact that the interviewers, in all but one case, opted to interview the wives of the two-parent families. Thus excepting seven of the teenagers and two men (one from a motherless family), all the respondents were women.

Representatives of 46 of 63 families (73%) were interviewed. Nine teenagers over 16 were also interviewed. The age restriction was placed on the teenagers because individuals are not entitled to benefits until they are 16. Table 1 shows the family composition of the sample:

TABLE 1. Family Composition of the Sample.

Family Composition	No.	%
Fatherless families	21	38.2
Motherless family	1	1.8
Two-parent families	24	43.6
Teenagers	9	16.4
Total :	55	100.0

The total sample was limited in size due to time restrictions and the unwillingness of some families to participate in the study. Because of the philosophy of the Project, no family was coerced into participation. The study was widely publicised in the Family Centre Project's newsletter 'The Bulletin' and around the Centre. Interviews were conducted over a four-week period. If families, after being contacted either personally or by letter, had not shown any interest by the end of that period, it was assumed that they did not wish to participate in the study. It is not felt that those families who were not interviewed would have altered the survey results. The ratio of single to two-parent families in the sample is representative of the Family Centre membership.

The teenagers were selected on a more ad hoc basis, i.e. if they attended the adolescent program or if they were around the Centre and agreed to be interviewed.

Structured Interview Schedule -

It was decided to use a structured interview schedule to initially gather information about the family members' experiences and attitudes towards the Department of Social Security and the C.E.S. The interviews were conducted between February 25th and March 22nd 1975. The interview schedule was developed out of current Family Centre Project knowledge and selected reading. (See Appendix C).

A research component was built into the Project from the outset. Like other resources, research was seen as an opportunity for the families to participate in the decision-making process and as a way of providing skills and a sharing of knowledge. Research, therefore, has always been geared to the families' needs and subject to the families' approval.

It was decided that this study provided a valuable opportunity to teach some Family Centre members about research skills. Three Family Centre members were trained as interviewers.

The interview schedule was pretested on the interviewers. The interviewers made an extremely valuable contribution at this stage, not only in terms of the design of the schedule, but also in pointing out areas which needed to be investigated further. For instance, it was particularly important to ensure that each question could be understood by the respondents. The interviewers were able to point to questions which were unintelligible or ambiguous. The final interview schedule contained both open and closed questions.

A structured interview schedule has the advantage of standardisation and ensuring comparable data (subject to its reliability and validity). However, this method necessitates a loss of data. The way people phrase or qualify answers usually has to be ignored so that answers can be categorised. Furthermore, the responses obtained from a structured interview schedule are a function of time and the setting of the interview. For instance, it would be expected that attitudes to the Department of Social Security would be related to when the respondent last visited the Department. Finally, it is felt that structured interview schedules are, to some extent, an alien way of collecting information for low-income families.

Couch and Keniston¹ have found that low-income groups are more likely to experience boredom, fatigue and lack of understanding. Experience within the Project has also found that many families view interview schedules with suspicion.

Supplementary Data -

Because of the implicit limitations of a structured interview schedule, it was planned that the survey information should be supplemented with discussion groups. These discussion groups would also provide an opportunity to feed the results of the survey back to the families.

Also, the families' recent experiences with the Department of Social Security and the C.E.S. were documented. This information was collected by the Social Security Resource person whose responsibility was to help the families understand the workings of these bodies in order that they obtain their rights.

These two additional sources of data were fortuitously supplemented by a third means. Just prior to Easter 1975, a demonstration to the Department of Social Security was organised by a group of welfare agencies which included the Family Centre Project. The process of organising and carrying out this demonstration was documented and provides further information about the inter-action between the claimant and the Government Departments. (See p. 58).

Claimant Research -

The contribution of the interviewers was quite crucial, not only in the design and administration of the questionnaire, but also in overcoming the families' suspicion of interviewers and interview schedules. It would seem a significant factor for future research activities with low-income families because it removes the mystique of research and permits them to control their own research activities.

REFERENCES

1. Couch, A. and Keniston, K. 'Yeasayers and naysayers: Agreeing Response set as a Personality Variable' in Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychiatry, March, 1960. p.151-174.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Results and Discussion Section will be divided into three parts. Part I is concerned with the Department of Social Security, and Part II with the C.E.S. Part III examines the relationship between these two departments and how this relationship affects the families.

PART I. THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SECURITY

(i) Knowledge -

94.5% of the respondents had heard about the Department of Social Security. Only three respondents said that they had not heard of the Department. Two were teenagers, which could explain why they had not heard of the Department, and the third did not recognise the name 'Social Security', but was able to answer questions about 'the Pensions Department'.

TABLE 2. Origin of Information about the Department of Social Security..

Origins of Information	No.	%
Friends or family	18	34.0
From Department or mass media	3	5.7
Social workers, welfare workers or staff of Brotherhood of St Laurence	14	26.4
Doctors, Police, Minister of Religion, Hospitals	12	22.6
Other *	5	9.4
Don't know	1	1.9
Total :	53	100.0

The Respondents (66.1%) had primarily heard about the Department of Social Security through friends, families or people working in the welfare field (Table 2). Only three respondents had heard about the Department either through the mass media or through the Department of Social Security.

* Refers to the State Government Social Welfare Department and the C.E.S.

Most of the teenagers had heard about the Department of Social Security in the last two years. If we exclude this group, it can be seen that thirty-five of the adult respondents have known about the Department for more than four years. Although the staff of the Family Centre Project have made considerable efforts to inform the families of their welfare rights, Table 3 shows that nearly all of the adults knew about the Department before they joined the Project:

TABLE 3. Length of Time Respondents had known about the Department of Social Security by Family Composition.

Family Composition	To 1 Year	2-3 Years	4-5 Years	6-10 Years	10 years or more	No Answer	Total
Head of one parent family	-	4	7	7	4	-	22
Member of two parent family	1	6	4	10	3	-	24
Teenager	4	1	1	-	-	1	7
Total:	5	11	12	17	7	1	53
%	9.4	20.8	22.6	32.1	13.2	1.9	100.0

Table 4 shows that 67.3% of the respondents or their spouses had visited the Department of Social Security State Headquarters in Melbourne in the last year. In 64.2% of the cases, it was the woman who had made the contact. Only 10 husbands and two teenagers had visited the Department.

TABLE 4. Length of Time since last visit to the Department of Social Security

Time of last visit	No.	%
Within last month	14	26.4
1-3 months	11	20.8
4-6 months	5	9.4
7-12 months	7	13.2
1-2 years	4	7.6
3 or more years	5	9.4
Never	6	11.3
No Answer	1	1.9
Total :	53	100.0

The reason for this extensive contact is obvious - nearly all the respondents or their spouses at some stage had applied for a pension or benefit (92.7%). The type of pension or benefit applied for is shown in Table 5. Of all the respondents, only one teenager and one two-parent family had never applied for a pension or a benefit. The respondents were asked to specify which benefit or pension had been applied for:

TABLE 5. Type of Pension or Benefit Applied for by Applicant.

Applicant	Widow's Pension	Invalid Pension	Supporting Mother's Benefit	Unemployment Benefit	Sickness Benefit	Other	Don't Know	Total
Wife	14	6	11	3	1	1	2	38
Husband	-	5	-	12	5	1	-	23
Teenager	-	-	-	5	1	-	-	6
Total :	14	11	11	20	7	2	2	67
%	20.9	16.4	16.4	29.9	10.4	3.0	3.0	100.0

It was possible for an individual to have applied for more than one pension or benefit. For instance, a husband may first receive sickness benefit and then if the illness becomes chronic, he may be transferred to an invalid pension.

It is not uncommon for a man to have applied for both unemployment and sickness benefits in a given period of time. The men in the Centre generally are irregular workers with a high job turnover. 72% of all the men in the Family Centre Project (excluding invalid pensioners) held more than one job over a two-year period 1973-1975. Furthermore, only three men maintained the same job throughout that period. They are frequently entitled to unemployment benefits. Further, because they do not stay in jobs for any length of time, they are rarely entitled to sick pay when they are sick and, in these times, are eligible for sickness benefits.

Two-parent families where the parents have a defacto relationship may receive more than one type of pension or benefit. The woman may receive a widow's pension or a supporting mother's benefit, while the man receives an unemployment or sickness benefit. It is, in fact, illegal for the women to receive a pension or benefit while living in a defacto relationship. However, if the man is an irregular worker, the woman is, understandably, reluctant to give up the security of the regular income provided by the pension or benefit. Furthermore, the relationship may not be permanent enough for her to expect the man to maintain her and her children.

Most of the women receiving pensions or benefits were single-parent families. Few women, even single parents, have ever applied for unemployment or sickness benefits. The reason for this is that because, on the whole, the women in the Project do not work. Thus, the women's main reason for contact with the Department of Social Security has been related to their application for widow's pension or supporting mother's benefit while the husband's main reason for contact has concerned unemployment benefits or sickness benefits.

The 'Other' category refers to instances of individuals applying for an age pension and a wife's allowance. None of the respondents said that they had received special benefits. It is known, however, that two men not interviewed have received special benefits because they were single parents responsible for the care of children.

TABLE 6. Type of Pension or Benefit by Current Receipt of Pension or Benefit.

Receipt of Pension or Benefit	Widow's Pension	Invalid Pension	Supporting Mother's Benefit	Unemployment Benefit	Sickness Benefit	Other	No Answer	Total % N = 67
Currently receiving pension or benefit	7	7	7	10	5	4	1	61.2
No longer receiving pension or benefit	3	2	2	8	1	1	-	25.4
Appln. was rejected	2	2	1	1	1	-	1	11.9
No answer	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1.5

Of the 67 applications, there were 8 instances where the respondents or their spouses were not eligible for the pension or benefit. The respondents who were not eligible applied for special benefit, invalid pensions, supporting mothers' benefit and widows' pension:

The two respondents who had applied for an invalid pension were not eligible because their health problem was not severe enough.

One woman was refused supporting mothers' benefit because her weekly income was too high.

The respondent who applied for widows' pension was reunited with her husband and thus became ineligible.

Two respondents seemed to have encountered some administrative problems, 'the application form had been lost', or 'the husband was not interviewed' and the families never bothered to follow the matter through. On the whole, when families applied for pension or benefit, they have received them and most of the respondents or their spouses have continued to receive their pension or benefit.

As Table 7 demonstrates, most of the women applied for pensions or benefits over three years ago. The men's distribution, on the other hand, shows a far more even spread. This is mainly because it is unlikely for a person to receive unemployment benefits over long periods of time.

TABLE 7. Length of Time Since Application for Current Pension or Benefit.

Applicant	Less than 3 months ago	4 - 6 months ago	7 - 12 months ago	1 - 2 years ago	3 - 4 years ago	5 and more years ago	No answer	%
Women	3	1	3	5	9	17	-	56.7
Men	4	3	6	4	4	2	-	34.3
Teenager	4	-	-	1	-	-	1	9.0
Total:	11	4	9	10	13	19	1	100.0
%	16.4	6.0	13.4	14.9	19.4	28.4	1.5	

Table 8 suggests that it takes a considerably longer time for pensions to be approved and to arrive than it does for benefits. This would obviously be true for invalid pensions where eligibility is subject to medical opinion. However, generally while people are awaiting determination of an invalid pension, they are in receipt of sickness benefits. Similarly, women waiting determination of a widows' pension or supporting mothers' benefit are normally in receipt of family assistance from the State Government Social Welfare Department. Thus, perhaps the additional delay is not so serious for pensioners as it is for beneficiaries.

TABLE 8. Waiting Period for Pension or Benefits.

	Waiting Period				Total No.	% N=67
	0 - 2 weeks	3 - 4 weeks	5 - 8 weeks	8 or more weeks		
Pensions (including supporting mothers' benefit)	4	9	4	9	26	54.2
Benefits	7	13	1	1	22	45.8
%	22.9	45.8	10.4	20.9	48	100.0

Table 9 shows that of those respondents who had visited the Department of Social Security, 72.3% were women. The high proportion of women is due to the fact that approximately half the sample are women who are single parents receiving the widows' pension or supporting mothers' benefit. However, it can also be seen that 13 of the wives in two-parent families visited the Department. This brings out the point that the wives often approach the Department on behalf of their husbands or at least accompany them.

TABLE 9. Family Members who visited the Department of Social Security by Family Composition.

Family Composition	Visit made by				No answer
	Men	Women	Teenager	Other	
One-parent families	1	21	-	-	-
Two-parent families	9	13	-	-	-
Teenager	-	-	2	1	6
Total (N=53)	10	34	2	1	6
%	18.9	64.2	3.8	1.8	11.3

Table 10 shows that the main reason for going to the Department is when cheques fail to arrive and that the main difficulties are with unemployment benefit cheques. The respondents were specifically asked, in a later section of the interview, if a pension or benefit cheque had ever failed to arrive - 65.5% had had this problem; 19 were women (52.8%) and 15 were men and two were teenagers.

TABLE 10. Reason for visit to the Department of Social Security.

Reason for Visit	No.	%
Non-arrival of benefit cheque (1)	12	22.7
Non-arrival of pension cheque (2)	9	17.0
Enquiries about pensions or benefits	6	11.3
Application for pension, etc.	6	11.3
Notification about change in circumstances	6	11.3
To submit doctor's certificate for sickness benefits	3	5.7
Other	5	9.4
Never been	6	11.3
Total:	53	100.0

(1) Excluding supporting mothers' benefit.

(2) Including supporting mothers' benefit.

(ii) Cheque Delays -

Tables 11 and 12 demonstrate that there has been a high incidence of cheques failing to arrive on the due date - primarily, unemployment benefit cheques (38.8%).

TABLE 11. Length of Time Since Last Occurrence of Delayed Cheque.

Last Occurrence	No.	%
0 - 6 months ago	22	61.1
7 - 12 months ago	7	19.45
1 or more years ago	7	19.45
Total:	36	100.00

TABLE 12. Type of Cheque Delayed.

Type of Cheque	No.	%
Widows' pension	6	16.7
Invalid pension	5	13.9
Supporting mothers' benefit	6	16.7
Unemployment benefit	14	38.8
Sickness benefit	5	13.9
Total:	36	100.0

The reasons for delayed cheques are complex and have changed over time. The C.E.S. and the Department of Social Security both play a role in the administration of unemployment benefits. Up until January 1975, a person receiving unemployment benefits had to attend a C.E.S. office and submit an income statement each week. These weekly income statements were then sent to the Department of Social Security. As the numbers of unemployed increased, the policy was changed in January so that unemployed people could post the weekly income statement to the C.E.S.

But, this new procedure had two problems - firstly, postal delays have meant delayed cheques and, secondly, the registrant had to have the foresight to send his weekly income statement in at least two days ahead of time so that it would arrive at the C.E.S. office on the due date. In November and December, 1974, it was not uncommon for three families in any week to have not received their unemployment benefits. In fact, in one of the survey weeks in February, 1975, six individuals had not received their unemployment benefit cheques.

The delays were, of course, exacerbated by the dramatic increase in the number of people receiving unemployment benefit during 1974 and 1975, and the Department of Social Security has conceded the difficulties it faced in meeting this demand:

"Senator Baume - I appreciate that you have increased your staff quite considerably. Is it possible for people to get adequate service from the offices in the main city where they go to have problems sorted out?

Mr Kimball - Yes, I am aware of the difficulties. We have not been satisfied that we have been providing service for 100 per cent of customers. We took out some figures to give us an indication of how well we were responding overall. We did find that in samples taken in Sydney and Melbourne - certainly Melbourne - something like 85 per cent of claimants were receiving their initial unemployment benefit cheque within 9 or 10 days from the time their claim was lodged. We did find though that something like 8 per cent were not getting it for perhaps 21 days or more. Some of the 8 per cent were not getting it because of factors outside our control. They had not lodged the income statement which is a necessary prerequisite to continuing entitlement, or it might have been delayed in the mail. Perhaps a factor inside our control was that it had not been handled as expeditiously as it might have when it arrived because of pressures, or because of human frailty or whatever. We estimated that we ought to be able to try to do something about something like 4 per cent.

The basic problem, we concluded, is the enormous amount of paper involved in the cycle of getting an income statement back to the Department of Labor, from the Department of Labor back to us, to be matched up on our system with a ledger card, to satisfy the question of continuing entitlement, and into the system to produce a cheque. We set about, late February to early March, in conjunction with officers of the Department of Labor, seeing whether we could in fact reduce this flow of paper and improve the service while doing it; because I think it had become evident that the numbers of people coming to our counters were there because a cheque had not arrived on the date when their entitlement was due.

These cheques go out on Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday, according to a fixed cycle. If the cheque did not arrive on the Monday, naturally the people would come and ask where was it. The indications were that a large element of this was because of problems in getting this income statement into the system and matching it with the basic record." ¹

Recognising these problems, in April, 1975, the Department of Social Security changed the income statement procedure:

- (a) People who were not placed in employment when they registered as unemployed could, as previously, claim unemployment benefit. They would be asked to lodge a first income statement at the employment office or agency one week later if they were still seeking work.
- (b) The second income statement had to be lodged by the beneficiary at the end of the fourth week and further statements at the end of each subsequent fourth week. ²

The changes have enabled the unemployment benefit system to become more computerised. Hopefully, this will have important consequences. Formerly, if a person had a delay in the arrival of a cheque and sought a duplicate cheque, the process of receiving a counter cheque (removal of the claimant's file from the normal processing procedure and the issuing of a duplicate cheque) meant that the subsequent week's cheque could be delayed. To illustrate this - a married man with four children failed to receive his unemployment benefit cheque on the due date. He went into the Department and was issued a duplicate cheque. The next week, his cheque also failed to arrive. He again returned to the Department and received another duplicate cheque. When the same problem occurred in the third week, the Department refused to issue him a third duplicate cheque. This meant that the family had very little income that week. The problem was finally traced back when a staff member of the Project contacted the Department and was informed that the failure of the first cheque to arrive had been due to the fact that the man had put an incorrect postal code on his weekly income form. Each time after when he had received a duplicate cheque, his next cheque had been delayed because the investigation required the removal of the file and prevented it from being available to process later cheques. ³

The survey results do not give an accurate picture of the problem of delayed cheques for two reasons :

1. It underestimates the incidence of the problem because it is based only on the last time a cheque was delayed.
2. It does not provide a detailed account of the process which claimants have to go through in order to replace or recover the cheque.

A more accurate estimate of the incidence of delayed cheques can be obtained from the Family Centre's weekly income supplement data. One provision of the income supplement scheme was that families could be 'advanced' or lent the equivalent of their pension or benefit entitlement in the event of the cheque being delayed, or when the family was awaiting receipt of their first unemployment benefit cheque. In the period between February 1973, and October 1974, 258 such advances were made.⁴

In discussing delayed cheques, it is important to distinguish between different delays :

- (a) There is a legislative delay which is any waiting period imposed on claimants by legislation. Under existing legislation, unemployment and sickness beneficiaries having lodged a claim have to wait seven days before becoming eligible for benefit.
- (b) There is an administrative delay which is the gap between the date of entitlement and the arrival of the cheque. Until January 1975, for instance, unemployment benefits were paid retrospectively and therefore claimants had to wait another seven days before receiving payment - making 14 days in all. Adding processing time, claimants usually did not receive their cheques until 21 days.
- (c) There is the human factor delay which is the result of mistakes and carelessness by claimants or officers of the C.E.S. and the Department of Social Security. This could include not filling in the form correctly and not registering a notified change of address.
- (d) There is an entitlement gap which is the difference between

what a claimant is entitled to receive and what a claimant actually receives. One family whose child was returned to their custody after being in an institution, did not receive their full entitlement until five weeks later and after repeated telephone calls and letters to the Department. Another example occurred when a man incorrectly filled in his sickness benefit form and did not specify whether his wife was working or not. The family did not receive the wife's allowance nor were they notified why a full entitlement was not being forwarded. It took four weeks before the situation was clarified and the family received the correct amount.

The 'advances' statistics indicate that the families have experienced considerable and recurring difficulties in receiving the right amount at the right time.⁵

From Table 13, it can be seen that the Department replaces most delayed cheques generally within the first week. This suggests that the Department is fairly efficient in solving these problems. It is our experience, however, that quick responses of the Department are as much influenced by the insistence of the families as it is by the concern of the Department to ensure that claimants receive their entitlements.

TABLE 13. Period Taken for 'Lost Cheques' to be Replaced

Period Taken	No.	% N = 36
No answer	1.	2.8
Counter cheque immediately	10	27.8
1 week	12	33.3
2 weeks	5	13.9
3 weeks or more	2	5.6
Never received	3	8.3
Other	3	8.3
Total :	36	100.0

When the Family Centre Project began, almost three years ago, delays in receiving pensions or benefits regularly occurred. Family members either accepted the delay philosophically or they expected a Family Centre staff member to resolve the problem for them. Family members might ring the Department and be told that if the cheque did not arrive in a couple of days, they should come into the Department. Or, on enquiring about a cheque that had not arrived, a family member might be assured by a Departmental officer that the cheque was in the mail. Often, after waiting several days, without receiving a cheque, it has been revealed that no cheque has been mailed. Without the Project's income supplement scheme, these families would have been destitute. The income supplement scheme has had to regularly advance families their pension and benefit entitlements. It has been a goal of the Project to educate families about their rights and the means of obtaining their rights. A staff member has been employed to work specifically in the area of Social Security and ensure that all the families knew how to obtain their pension or benefit entitlement. Gradually, when problems occurred, the Social Security Resource person helped the families learn how to resolve the problems for themselves without the need for a staff person to act as a mediator between the family and the Department.⁶

The survey indicates that these efforts have been succeeding. The respondents were asked what they did when their cheques failed to arrive. The results are reported in Table 14 which shows that 69.5% personally visited the Department rather than just telephone. The families have learnt that they can obtain better service by going into the Department. They also know now that in order to obtain a duplicate cheque, they must personally go into the Department.

TABLE 14. Action when Cheque was Delayed.

Action Taken	No.	%
Rang Department	10	27.8
Went into Department	13	36.1
Went into Department and received a counter cheque	12	33.3
Other	1	2.8
Total	36	100.0

In presenting the actions taken by the families when cheques were delayed in a tabular form (Table 14), there has been a considerable loss of information. For instance, the category 'ringing the Department' does not indicate the number of 'phone calls made nor does it indicate the effectiveness of these 'phone calls. At this point, it is far easier to cite examples of difficulties with which the Social Security Resource staff have been involved.

There has always been a major emphasis on enabling the families to deal with their problems with the Department of Social Security by themselves, with the professional staff in the background as advisors. However, if the families encounter obstacles, the staff may intervene. The usual method is to contact the Telephone Liaison Service rather than contact the Enquiries' Section. Experience of any social worker indicates that it is a frustrating, if not futile, exercise to 'phone the Department number listed in the telephone directory. The establishment of the Telephone Liaison Service was welcomed because it meant that the Department could be relatively easily contacted. Naturally, this service was not publicised to the claimant because it would have defeated the purpose of the exercise, i.e. a telephone line with restricted use. However, from November, 1974 and the extraordinary increase in the number of unemployment beneficiaries, this contact point also became over-utilised so that instead of a reply on the day, the resource person had to wait until the next day. This is not meant to be a criticism of the staff or the service, but an observation that the service could not cope with the demand placed on it.

The Telephone Liaison Service has been important because of the difficulty in using the General Enquiries' Section of the Department of Social Security. The Enquiries' Section has not been very helpful. The claimants have often been misinformed. It has become almost a cliché for families to be told when cheques do not arrive that 'they should wait for a few days and if the cheque does not come, they should then come into the Department'. Another frequent response from the Enquiries' Section is that 'the cheque has been sent'. Yet there have been numerous examples of families who have been told this and who have waited additional days only to find that there has been some hold-up, e.g. the file has been lost.

It is difficult to document this evidence because rarely do people record their telephone calls and there is no guarantee that the officer on the other end of the telephone is recording the telephone enquiry in the person's file.

The following case study illustrates the problems a claimant can encounter when a cheque is delayed :

Mr. X. is a married man with four young children. He registered at the local C.E.S. as an unemployed person on the 24th March, 1975. He handed in his first unemployment benefit claim form a week later. On the 9th April, 1975 he came into the Family Centre and saw the Social Security Resource person and complained that he had not received a cheque. The resource person then rang Unemployment Benefit Enquiries at the State Headquarters of the Department of Social Security to find out when Mr. X. was likely to receive his cheque. The Resource person was told that Mr. X. would have to wait another week. Quite significantly, the Social Security officer who answered the query did not leave the telephone and, therefore could not have consulted Mr. X's file.

On the 19th April 1975, Mr. X again came into the Centre, complaining that his cheque had not arrived. The Resource person was going into the State Headquarters of the Department with another family member and suggested that Mr. X go in with them. Mr. X. went to the 9th floor of the Department (Benefit Enquiries) where he was told to fill out another form. He was told that he would receive a cheque or a letter by the following Thursday (22nd April).

On the 22nd April, 1975 the cheque did not arrive. Mr. X. contacted the Resource person who rang Benefit Enquiries and spoke to a different officer. This officer went away to get Mr. X's file. When he returned, he told the Resource person that there was no record of the claim. When asked, the officer could not offer any advice about what Mr. X could do. The Resource person then decided to telephone the Assistant Director, but found that she could not contact him.

She finally spoke to another officer who said that he would ring back before lunch-time. At about 12 p.m., the Resource person received a 'phone call from yet another officer who told her that there had been a thorough search made and that there was no record of the claim. He advised that Mr X. return to the C.E.S. office to fill in a duplicate form and then bring the form into the Department to him.

Mr X. did this and went into the Department at 1 p.m. and asked for the officer who had rung the Centre. None of the staff at the counters knew the man or offered to find him. (Mr. X. went to the counter three times, but without success.) Fortunately, the Resource person had gone into the Department on another matter and saw Mr X. still waiting at 3 p.m. She and Mr X. went to the Assistant Director's office where the secretary located the officer for them. The officer then processed the claim form and Mr X. received his back-payment that day - a cheque for \$308. Unfortunately, he received the cheque after the banks had closed. Thus, the family could not cash the cheque until the next day.

There seem to be two main factors in determining whether or not a claimant is assisted; the particular staff member and the particular claimant. As Frances and Stone have suggested:

"If the interviewers felt that a client deserved compensation, they would attempt to aid him and, in such cases, considered agency procedures a means to the end of service to the client. If, on the other hand, interviewers felt that clients did not deserve compensation, then they would use the procedures and official rules to sustain their opinion. In many cases, decisions were routine and procedure was followed because there was no available alternative." 7

To some extent, the families have developed skills in obtaining their entitlements from the Department and, for this reason, the time taken to rectify mistakes has probably been reduced. It is not known to what extent other pensioners and beneficiaries have these skills and are able to deal with the Department personally.

(iii) Service -

The respondents were asked to evaluate the service they received from the Social Security staff. Their responses to this question were crudely broken down into three categories:

TABLE 15. Respondents' Assessment of Service from the Department of Social Security.

Service Assessment	No.	%
Favourable	23	50.0
All right, O.K.	6	13.0
Unfavourable	15	32.6
Other	1	2.2
No Answer	1	2.2
Total:	46	100.0

Half the families felt that they had been favourably treated by the staff. Typical responses were that the staff were polite or helpful.

Of those respondents who went to the Department of Social Security, 71.7% felt that their problem had been solved. It is interesting to note how the respondents saw that their problem was solved. For some, it was clear-cut they had been given duplicate cheques or the problem had been solved:

"By getting extra money".

"By telling me that they would send a tramway pass out to me".

"Because I asked for confidentiality and got it."

"They filled out the form for me".

"They told me it was in the post and it was".

Other respondents seemed satisfied with less direct action, e.g:

"She said not to worry and give me an address to get a food order and I was able to get a little money as well".

"Gave him papers to fill in and told him to take it back".

"They spoke to my wife and told her she would get help if she filled in papers and made a declaration".

"We got the cheque within a couple of days".

"The cheque arrived on the Friday".

"By telling me it would be in the mail".

To supplement the information about service delivery obtained from the survey data, a discussion group was held in the Centre. Much of the discussion focussed on the treatment that the families had received at the Social Security counters. There was a fair amount of ambivalence towards the Social Security staff.

It seemed to be a shared feeling at these discussions that the officers did not understand the families and their circumstances:

"You know what the trouble with half the staff in there is and half the Government places; they've never had to wait for a cheque; they've never had to be on Social Service; they've never had to be on sickness benefit - they don't know what it's like. They say they go to organisations. Now organisations are zoned now, you know. St Vincent de Paul near here, if you want to get a food voucher off them, you've got to wait till a man comes from B..... to come and see you, so that makes another four days. If they've never been on Social Services, they don't know what it's like. If they had to be on Social Service, they'd be more courteous, as you know some people have never been on Social Service and don't know what it's like."

"I'm not going to go in there and tell an eighteen year old sheila my troubles. She hasn't got a clue what's going on in the world, thinking of her own business, never mind anybody else's business. They're too young in there".

"...... they say 'well, look, we've got our books on what was sent on such and such a date. Now if you're not satisfied, we can't do anything about it. Why don't you go and check your posts. See if he's left it. See if it's been knocked off'. Well, that's really going to help towards the cost of tucker, isn't it ... running around asking your postie, did you flog my cheque or was it the bloke before you?"

"Yeah, but he reckoned he wasn't treated right while he was in there. But as I said when I sent in those forms that ... filled in, he's the one that's got to suffer it, not me. And another thing too, the last day he just turned round and ripped the whole three of the forms up, 'cos he said he's not getting treated right ... he's getting sick of waiting for them."

The families also acknowledged that the officers were not always to blame when they had not received satisfactory service:

"That big black-headed chap, he's pretty good, he's the only one I know there who knows if you've got kids he'll back-date your payment for you. He's not supposed to do it but he's the only one."

"I think the counterhands often take a lot of blame, but I think a lot of us people often forget that they're not doing it off their own bat, they've got the guys in the office to answer to. They're not getting the brunt of it ... it's the poor person on the counter that B... would be blasting. Mr Kopp doesn't get told what goes on, and he admitted he didn't know half of what goes on."

As the following exchange illustrates, the families recognise that many of their difficulties stem from complex institutional rather than individual factors:

"We are apt to blame the counter hands for an awful lot. They have the pressure from both sides; the public and the people behind them. I don't think we should blame them."

"I blame the system".

"What system? There isn't a system?"

"What's the system that is causing all the problems?"

"The guys in the background who're handling the forms."

To overcome some of these problems, the families made a number of recommendations:

First, the families felt that the service would be improved if the number of people handling an individual's problem were reduced.

"Do you know what's wrong with them? Instead of one person following your case right through, they'll hand it on. Why can't one person that takes your name go and get your file and have a look at it".

Second, they felt that the officers needed more training:

"Some of the people working behind the counters are not fully trained people."

"The people behind them counters don't know their trade, how the hell are we expected to know it?"

Finally, they felt that the number of officers should be increased:

"The poor guy in the Pensions Department. He's sitting there at his desk and he's got a queue a mile long. He does a damn good job. They've got 12 cubicles. Last time I went down there I thought 'oh yeah, they've got 12 cubicles this won't take long'. But, there was two down on that half and one down on that half. They said they was short-staffed."

Similar comments have been made by several voluntary welfare agencies who have given evidence to the Royal Commission on Government Administration:

"I think the basic fault here is that counter staff are probably chosen with the least amount of thought to the demands that are going to be made upon them. The mere ability to answer questions - and, incidentally, the question is not always answered correctly - there is not enough thought given to the enormously important nature of their position, therefore, there should be a better training, a better selection, there should be a considerable amount of thought given to the fact that this is the point at which the Government meets the people and, therefore, the person who does this is a person who should be chosen with a great deal of care, possibly trained." 8

Too much emphasis can be placed, however, on the officers. The families themselves realised some of the constraints operating on these staff and generally felt that they had been well treated. The counter in the Department of Social Security is naturally the focus of criticism for it is at this point that the major interaction between claimant and organisation occurs. Yet the problems which occur at the counter are only symptoms of a disorder which permeates the total system.

In a submission to the Royal Commission on Government Administration, the Director-General of the Department of Social Security, Mr L. J. Daniels, has argued inter alia that:

"Counter service is one of our basic points of communication with the public and for many people it may be one of the few contacts they make with the Government. We, therefore, aim to train officers who work on counters in courtesy and capacity to deal with the public and to offer helpful information and advice. The work is, however, of a most demanding character as a large proportion of our clients have to be helped to frame their questions as well as be given the answers. In many cases, it transpires that the information or service they need is the responsibility of another Australian Government Department or a State Department. Members of the public are disappointed and often difficult to satisfy when they feel shuffled from department to department."

"Our own counter services are continually under review and study with a view to reducing delays, making conditions more comfortable for members of the public who have to wait and otherwise improving the quality of our services. The nature of our task is continually under change, often sudden change, for example, the steep increase in unemployment levels in recent months has brought a large increase of enquiries at our counters regarding unemployment benefits and queries associated therewith. This has created difficulties at some of our counters because of the greatly increased volume of enquiries and the greater urgency of the needs of many of the people making enquiries. Difficulties arise for us when people seeking immediate payment of unemployment benefits have to be handled at the same time as, for example, age pensioners with enquiries about the application of the means test, people seeking child endowment information, etc. Every effort is made to provide as much privacy as possible for people who wish to discuss their affairs in a detailed way and to otherwise reduce the demeaning characteristics of the situation in the eyes of enquirers." 9.

Mr Daniels has, quite rightly, pinpointed the significance of officers, but to equate their high visibility with a proportionate degree of significance in terms of the problems faced by claimants is to misinterpret the claimants' situation.

Basically, there are two problems over neither of which the officers have substantial control. First, there is the claimant's personal situation - the lack of money and resources. Second, there are the bureaucratic procedures which officers are required to enforce.¹⁰ These procedures were explained by the Victorian Director of Social Security in Melbourne when speaking to a group of welfare recipients, welfare rights officers and others in his office in April, 1975. (See p. 58).

"The system requires that a form comes in. If no form comes in, there's nothing to pay."

The Director said there were four necessary stages in claimants receiving their entitlements :

- * A completed income statement.
- * An income statement lodged with the C.E.S.
- * An income statement received at the Department of Social Security.
- * An income statement received by the Department of Social Security on time.¹¹

The confusion and difficulties lie with these complex procedures. It is too simplistic to look for solutions of the system's dysfunction at the interface between claimant and officers. In other words the emphasis should shift from solving the problems to preventing the problems.

Alexander, Ishikawa and Silverstein have commented :

"Bureaucracy is one of the greatest enemies of effective service programs in low-income communities. Its essential feature is 'red tape', a middle-class invention. The poor do not know how to deal with red tape; they are overwhelmed by it, and antagonised by it."¹²

Knowledge of Rights -

The families' lack of knowledge about their statutory rights was clearly demonstrated in the survey and in the discussion group. 47.3% of the respondents said that they did not know about the services offered by the Department of Social Security. Yet, as indicated in Table 4, 92.7% of the families had dealt with the Department.

There were four main types of reasons given for not knowing their rights. Nine respondents said they did not know because they had never been told, e.g. "Don't know - no one has ever explained", 'Just have not heard'. The second reason given by another seven respondents was that they had never bothered to find out what their rights were, e.g. 'Never thought about it', 'Never enquired', 'Never thought to ask'. Three respondents felt that they did not need to know. The remainder gave no reason. The 29 respondents who said they did know about the services were first asked to list these services :

TABLE 16. Respondents Knowledge of the Department of Social Security as Assessed by Recall.

No. of Services	No. of Respondents	%
0	1	3.4
1	7	24.2
2	4	13.8
3	7	24.2
4	2	6.9
5	4	13.8
6	1	3.4
7	1	3.4
8	2	6.9
Total	29	100.0

These respondents listed an average of (3.21%) correct services. The services most frequently mentioned in order were: unemployment benefit, widows pension, sickness benefit, and child endowment. Only four respondents mentioned the Social Work service.

The respondents were then asked whether or not they knew of some specific services offered by the Department of Social Security. This was a much easier task because it entailed recognition and most of the respondents did in fact know of most of the services. (Table 17)

TABLE 17. Knowledge of Social Security Services as Assessed by Recognition.

Service	Yes		No		Don't Know		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Widows pension	52	98.1	1	1.9	-	0.0	53
Supporting mothers benefit	44	83.0	8	15.1	1	1.9	53
Invalid pension	45	84.9	7	13.2	1	1.9	53
Unemployment benefit	52	98.1	1	1.9	-	0.0	53
Sickness benefit	49	92.5	4	7.5	-	0.0	53
Social Work service	24	45.3	28	52.8	1	1.9	53
Child endowment	49	92.5	4	7.5	-	0.0	53
Rehabilitation allowance	16	30.2	36	67.9	1	1.9	53
Special benefits	38	71.7	15	28.3	-	0.0	53

It is worthwhile noting that there was a nearly perfect correlation of answers between the recall and the recognition questions¹³ in terms of knowledge of services.

Apart from the rehabilitation allowance which is a specific type of benefit, the lack of knowledge of the Social Work service and special benefits is most marked. Indeed it is most curious that the respondents had not heard about the Social Work service considering that most of the families have been 'chronic aid seekers'¹⁴ for the greater part of their lives. Prior to the Family Centre project these families had developed highly sophisticated methods of obtaining financial and material aid from voluntary agencies and other community organisations e.g. the poor box.¹⁵

The respondents were asked in a later section if they had ever used the Social Work service. 43.6% had used this service. The respondents who had not used this service gave three sorts of reasons. Either they had used other social workers (9.1%), felt they had no need to use the service (16.4%), or they had not heard about the service (23.6%). In view of Table 17 it would seem that lack of knowledge would have been the underlying reason for all these individuals not using the service.

Those respondents who had used the Social Work service primarily went there for help with pensions and benefit problems (Table 18). The families felt fairly favourably towards this service and 38.1% felt that it could not be improved.

TABLE 18. Reasons for Using the Social Work Service.

Reason	No.
Problems with pension	8
Problems with pension or benefit cheques	2
Advice about pensions	5
Other	4
No answer	4
Total	21

Considering the difficulties that some of the families have had in dealing with the officers it is unfortunate that more families have not heard about the Social Work service. The advantage of the Social Workers is that they are trained in understanding human problems and should have more time to explain and clarify the policies and procedures of the Department of Social Security.¹⁶

The families were also asked if they had heard of the Regional Social Security offices. Only nine respondents had heard of this service. To some extent this is a function of where the families live. Many of the families live in Fitzroy, Collingwood, Richmond and naturally deal directly with the State Headquarters.

(iv) Recommendations -

Table 19 lists the recommendations of the respondents with regard to how the Department of Social Security could improve its services. Respondents may have given more than one answer.

TABLE 19. Respondents' Recommendations regarding
Improvements to the Department of
Social Security.

Recommended Improvements	% N = 60
Increase pension or benefit	20.0
Abolish waiting period for benefits	3.3
Reduce waiting time when visiting the Department	11.7
More privacy	11.7
More helpful and polite staff	13.3
Increase staff	3.3
Speed up delivery of cheques	8.3
Other	28.4
Total	100.0

Other recommendations included :

"Giving pensioners more money - cutting out unemployment benefit for bludgers."

"Keep a closer watch on the bludgers."

"Instead of giving people money they should find people jobs."

"Prevent lost files."

"Pay cheques weekly rather than fortnightly."

"Creche for kids."

"Advertise more openly."

"More telephones."

"Better service, reorganise the system.. The whole system needs changing."

"More organised instead of being a computer."

The recommendations reflect the practical problems experienced by the families in their contact with the Department of Social Security - long waiting periods, inadequate pension and benefit rates and unhelpful staff - and, naturally enough, their recommendations concern the alleviation or removal of these problems.

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13. Ranking of Knowledge of Services from the Most Frequently Mentioned to Least Frequently Mentioned.

Recall Order	Recognition Order
1. Unemployment benefit	1. (Unemployment benefit Widows pension
2. (Widows pension Sickness benefit Child endowment	2. (Sickness benefit Child endowment
3. Invalid pension	3. Invalid pension
4. Supporting mothers benefit	4. Supporting mothers benefit
5. Social Work	5. Special benefit
6. Special benefit	6. Social Work
7. Rehabilitation allowance	7. Rehabilitation allowance

The only difference was in ranking of the Social Work and special benefits. More respondents specified that they knew of the Social Work service on the recall question than on the recognition question.

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PART II. COMMONWEALTH EMPLOYMENT SERVICE (C.E.S.)

(i) Knowledge -

The respondents were asked how they had come to know about the C.E.S. Table 20 shows that the respondents had primarily heard about the C.E.S. through friends, or people working in welfare settings, (71%). This corresponds with the way in which the respondents had heard about the Department of Social Security (See p. 14).

TABLE 20. Origins of Information about the C.E.S.

Origins of Information	No	%
Friends, family	27	49.1
Social workers, welfare officers, Brotherhood of St Laurence staff	12	21.9
Newspaper articles	2	3.6
By seeing C.E.S. offices	2	3.6
Other	8	14.6
No answer	2	3.6
Had not heard of C.E.S.	2	3.6
Total :	55	100.0

This suggests that both the C.E.S. and the Department of Social Security are not effectively publicising their services. Instead, they rely on other agents to notify the public of the services.

The respondents were asked when they or their spouses had last visited the C.E.S. office. (Table 21).

TABLE 21. Family Member who last visited C.E.S. Offices by when last visit made.

Family Member	Time of last visit						Total	%
	Within last month	1 - 6 months ago	7 - 12 months ago	1 - 2 years ago	3 or more years ago	Never been		
Women	4	2	2	1	11	-	20	37.7
Men	5	-	4	1	-	-	10	18.9
Teenagers	6	1	-	1	-	-	8	15.1
No answer	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	1.9
Never been	-	-	-	-	-	14	14	20.4
Total:	15	3	7	3	11	14	53*	100.0
% of total	28.3	5.7	13.2	5.7	20.7	26.4	100.0	

* two respondents had not heard of the C.E.S.

Table 21 points out two interesting facts. Firstly, a high percentage of women had visited the C.E.S. on their own behalf. This was surprising because experience in the Centre has revealed that the women rarely work or have any contact with the C.E.S. It was found that of the 20 women only five came from two parent families, thus the majority of the women had been pensioners. All except three of the women had gone to the C.E.S. to obtain a job. (One woman had applied for retraining, another had gone with her brother to the C.E.S. office when he had applied for a job and the third had gone because 'she had no money'.) It was expected that the women would not have had contact with the C.E.S. because of the means test attached to the pension.

A possible explanation for these results lies in the fact that most of the women visited the C.E.S. office over three years ago i.e. before the Project. The Income Supplement has probably improved the women's financial situation so that they have not needed to seek employment to increase their income. This would be consistent with the results of the Madison Guaranteed Minimum Income Experiment where they

found that the receipt of an income supplement reduced the women's work efforts.¹ Thus the women's reasons for going to the C.E.S. were probably related to their financial situation.

The second feature of the table is that the men and the teenagers were more likely to have used the C.E.S. in the last year.

Table 21 seems to suggest that the men have less contact with the C.E.S. than the women. This is not the case. The results are influenced by the fact that four husbands were invalid or aged pensioners and therefore had little need to contact the C.E.S. Furthermore the women had used the service over three years ago. The picture was further distorted by the fact that the respondents were not asked how frequently they had used the C.E.S. It can be seen that a high percentage of men had used the service within the last month (60%). That the husbands have more contact with the C.E.S. than the women is also borne out by the fact that in the period between February 1973 and October 1974, 18 of the husbands had applied for benefits (sickness and unemployment)* sixty times.

The respondents were asked why they or their spouses had gone to the C.E.S. offices.

TABLE 22. Reasons for going to the C.E.S. Offices.

Reasons	No	%
For a job	19	35.8
To hand in unemployment benefit forms	10	18.9
To apply for benefits	6	11.3
Because needed money	2	3.8
Other	2	3.8
Never been	14	26.4
Total:	53	100.0

* This information was gathered for the purposes of the Family Centre's income supplement scheme. In brief the income supplement provides the families with a Guaranteed Minimum Income. For a description of the scheme : SALMON, Jan. Resources for poor families: an experimental income supplement scheme, Commission of Inquiry into Poverty, Canberra, 1974. p. 13 - 19.

Naturally the most commonly cited reasons for visiting the C.E.S. was to find a job. It is interesting that 34% of the respondents specified that they or their spouses went to the C.E.S. to obtain benefits or financial assistance.

The C.E.S. acts as an agent for the Department of Social Security by collecting the initial income statements of beneficiaries and administering the work test. It could be suggested that this role could reduce their effectiveness in their major function - i.e. employment advice. This could occur in two ways. Firstly, the community could perceive its function as primarily providing benefits for the unemployed. The respondents seemed to have this view. Because there is still a certain amount of stigma attached to receiving benefits, the service may be seen as less reputable. Secondly, the time spent in processing benefit claims prevents the staff from carrying out their employment functions. In the period from November 1974 to February 1975, as the numbers of people registered as unemployed rise and there was a dramatic increase in the numbers of people receiving unemployment benefits, it became increasingly difficult for the C.E.S. staff to fulfil their employment function.²

(ii) Service -

The respondents were asked to evaluate the treatment which they had received from the C.E.S. staff. Their answers were crudely classified in three categories; favourable, neutral and unfavourable (Table 23). Caution must be exercised in analysing this table because some wives were asked to make an assessment of their husband's visit to the C.E.S. office. Their opinion would be based on what their husband had told them, and their own interpretations and perceptions.

TABLE 23. Evaluation of C.E.S. Service provided at last visit:

Evaluation.	No	%
Favourable	14	26.4
Alright, O.K., neutral response	19	35.9
Unfavourable	5	9.4
No answer	1	1.9
Never been	14	26.4
Total:	53	100.0

On the whole the respondents felt that they had received good or reasonable service. Typical favourable responses were 'good', 'polite', 'got a job straight away - very helpful'. Examples of neutral responses were, 'alright', 'they weren't rude but they weren't friendly either', 'O.K. they just gave you a form and sent you off', and 'helpful but became piggy after a while'. Examples of unfavourable responses were - 'they were a bit nasty'. They told him he should have a job', 'they made you wait', 'bloody rotten', 'routine, they didn't go out of their way'.

It could be expected that the respondents' assessment of the service would be related to whether they felt that the C.E.S. had solved their problem or not. 66.7% of the respondents who had visited the C.E.S. (i.e. 39 respondents) felt that their problem had been solved. The problems had been solved primarily by providing jobs or by processing benefit claims. In one case the C.E.S. had organised retraining for one of the women. Despite the fact that only five respondents had felt that they or their spouses had received unfavourable treatment, 13 respondents said that they had not had their problem solved. In response to this situation they had either gone out to look for their own job or simply continued to put forms in (even though they were primarily seeking employment). One just went home and had a cup of coffee.

Because the sample interviewed were mainly women (p.10), only men who had had recent experience with the C.E.S. were asked to participate in the discussion group which was held to talk about the C.E.S. Ten men attended the discussion group.

The comments made by the men revealed a far more complex relationship between the claimant and the C.E.S. than revealed by the survey. First of all, the men felt that quality of service was the function of the individual C.E.S. staff member, the specific office and the Department of Social Security. All the men at some time had had a negative experience with the C.E.S. staff. These negative experiences seemed to be related to the application of the work test :

"Four weeks I waited for a cheque just to find out that I'd been cut off (unemployment benefits). Six weeks ago they

sent me from Preston to the Prahran Council. I never even had an interview. They sent me a telegram about six weeks back. I had to see the Council. I went and told them straight out it was no bloody good to me. J (a Family Centre staff member) got on the phone and explained that I'd be losing \$10.00 a week." *

"They sent me to a job yesterday. I had to go to see the chap. Where was the job? Ringwood. To be there at half past seven in the morning. I just went to the bloke (the employer) and put it straight on the line to him and said 'Look I can't take the job for the simple reason I've got no way of getting there and what's more I would not be able to get there at 7.30 and so I'm wasting your time and you're wasting mine.' I explained the position and told him that I had to come and see about the job because if I hadn't have come they (C.E.S.) would have turned round automatically and said when I got back to the unemployment in the morning - Sorry you've been cut off benefits." **

"The Social Service Department is very contradictory in what its done. You used to have to report twice or three times a week to maintain your social service rating. The test was applied to you all the time. If you didn't do that or go to the job you were sent to - bingo - your social service was cut off. Now they never give a bloke the chance to apply for a job 'cos they don't even give you the chance to take a social service form - they send it to you. You don't go there. They don't want you in there." ***

It is interesting to note that the men seemed confused about the relationship between the C.E.S. and the Department of Social Security with respect to unemployment benefit claims. The last comment clearly points to this, (p. 54 - 57).

As a group they felt that the C.E.S. had no say in whether they received unemployment benefits or not, yet they realised that they could be cut off unemployment if they refused jobs offered to them by the C.E.S. The men were extremely vocal about being forced to take jobs :

Man 1 : "People shouldn't be forced to take jobs, which they can't really do and which they don't really want to do."

Man 2 : "You cannot work in a job unless you are satisfied in it. If you don't like it you're not going to be there long."

* This man has nine children and was receiving unemployment benefits of \$95.00 a week. If he had accepted the job (wage of \$78.00) he would have had to take a drop in income of \$13.00 a week.

** This man lived in Carlton and had no car.

*** This man is referring to the C.E.S.

Interviewer : "Have any of you ever been forced to take a job that you knew you wouldn't like from the start?"

Chorus : "Yes. If you don't take it, you get your social service cut off."

They felt that the C.E.S. staff should have a greater understanding of their needs when they offer jobs. For instance, the suitability of the job :

"They should be able to understand in the suburban offices that the job they're giving a chap is suitable for him. They should be able to look at size of family, transport costs, what the wages are and such."

Another man mentioned that jobs, are frequently unsuitable because the employers hold a weeks wages in hand. Thus the person is expected to work a couple of weeks before receiving any income.

The men also were critical of the interviewing procedures at the C.E.S. offices :

"When you took your form in you were supposed to be interviewed at least once a week. I went nearly seven months on UB (unemployment benefit) without an interview. Nothing was said to me about a job - nothing."

"I had about two interviews in three years."

"I've always had an interview. If I just took my form in and said see you later that would be one out of their hair." *

"We go into the C.E.S. office. There's a dirty great queue outside. You walk in, the bloke hands you one and takes one. No way of speaking to that bloke."

"I walk up and say I want to see about a job. You can demand to have an interview and there's nothing they can do about it." *

"I've done the same thing and been told to get out of the office."

"I won't move until I get an interview. I'll sit there all day." *

"They'll get to know him - and say here he comes - get ready for trouble."

In dealing with the C.E.S. they had found that the service varied

* These comments came from the same man.

according to the area. Furthermore they had noticed that there was a steady change in staff. This staff turnover presents problems. The men admitted that some staff are 'essentially good' and the men said that they try to ensure that they see the same staff each time. However, because of the staff turnover the men are constantly forced to deal with new staff. This is unfortunate because as the men pointed out it is important for the C.E.S. staff to be able to understand the men and to have a good relationship with them.

Overall the men felt that the service could be improved if the staff received better training :

"They ought to do at least a ten or twelve week course in public relations and things like this."

It is interesting that the men also saw a need for interpreters at the C.E.S. offices. Although the men had themselves not experienced any language difficulties they had observed the plight of migrants. Furthermore, they saw an interpreter service as a time-saving device which would mean that they would receive faster service.

A lack of knowledge of the C.E.S. was indicated by the results of the survey. 43.4% of the respondents said that they did not know about the services offered by the C.E.S. Nine of these respondents were women from single parent families. As mentioned above these women have had little recent contact with the C.E.S.. Again the sampling bias (females being interviewed) may be partially responsible for the lack of knowledge.

The 30 respondents claiming knowledge of the C.E.S. services were asked to list these services. Only four respondents could list more than two correct services. The picture substantially changed when all the respondents (excluding the two respondents who had not heard of the C.E.S.) were asked to recognise whether different services were offered by the C.E.S. The results are shown in Table 24.

TABLE 24. Recognition of C.E.S. Services.

Services	No. of respondents who knew of service	%	No. of respondents who did not know of service	%	Total respondents
Advice regarding employment	43	81.1	10	18.9	53
Application for unemployment benefit	53	100.0	-	0.0	53
Application for sickness benefit	46	86.8	7	3.2	53
Retraining scheme	34	64.2	19	35.8	53
Vocational guidance	12	22.6	41	77.4	53

From Table 24 it would appear that only the vocational guidance service is not well known.

(iii) Recommendations -

The respondents were asked what improvements could be made to the C.E.S. The results are shown in Table 25.

In studying Table 25, it must be noted that respondents could offer more than one suggestion. It also must be remembered that only 39 respondents had ever visited a C.E.S. office.

TABLE 25. Improvements to C.E.S. suggested by Respondents.

Improvements	No. of times mentioned
Provide more jobs	6
Force people to take jobs	4
Help people find jobs	8
More helpful staff	8
Speed service up	7
Other	14
Don't know	17

Most of the suggestions referred to the provision of jobs. It is very interesting that four respondents felt that the C.E.S. staff were not being forceful enough in insisting that people take jobs. For instance:

(The C.E.S.) "should try to find jobs. Make young ones take jobs - if not, then give them to those who would work."

(The C.E.S. should) "make men take the jobs. No job - no cheque."

These comments came from women and markedly conflicted with the men's views. This divergence is probably due to the fact that the women have not been forced to take unsuitable jobs. One teenager suggested in the interview that the C.E.S. "shouldn't force you to take jobs which are unsuitable".

The next most frequently cited suggestion was that the staff should be more polite. For instance:

(The C.E.S.) "should get people who know all about it and should not get nasty to people who cannot read and write."

"More politeness behind the counter."

"More helpful when you go for a job."

Eight respondents felt that the service was too slow. One felt this was because there was not enough staff at the offices. These respondents also gave a number of specific suggestions and comments which could not be categorised. For instance:

"Provide I.D. cards to give to employers to prove you are genuinely unemployed."

"Deal with people alphabetically."

(Have) "interview rooms".

Some felt that the service could not be improved :

"These services are doing a very good job."

"Very good idea to have them - especially for teenagers."

It is felt that the comments made by the men in the discussion groups were more insightful because the men had had recent and frequent contact with the C.E.S.

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DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND IMMIGRATION, Monthly review of the employment situation, November 1974 and January 1975.

PART III. WORKFARE AND WELFARE.

As mentioned in the previous section the men were confused about the relationship between the Department of Social Security and the C.E.S. (see p. 48).

This confusion was first indicated in the pre-test on the three Family Centre members engaged as interviewers. For instance, they did not initially understand that benefits were provided by the Department of Social Security and not the C.E.S. They also confused the Regional Social Security Offices with the regional C.E.S. offices. It was extremely difficult to formulate questions which did not give the respondents hints about the answer. For this reason a great deal of time was spent in training the interviewers not only in interviewing skills but also in understanding the role of the various government departments.

The respondents were asked if they knew the difference between the Department of Social Security and the C.E.S. 56.4% of the respondents said that they knew the difference, yet their answers revealed that either their knowledge was extremely superficial or was inaccurate. The most commonly given distinction was:

"Social Security is for pensions and the unemployment (C.E.S.) is for jobs."

"Pensions one place, jobs in other."

"Social Security provides pensions in general, C.E.S. provides employment for people."

These answers are correct but in themselves do not specify how the respondents see benefits. Other answers, however, throw up their confusion more clearly :

"Social Security deals with pensions and child endowment. The C.E.S. deals with employment and sickness."

"One is for people out of work and the other is for people who can't work."

"At the smaller offices (C.E.S.) you can't get counter cheques."

"Social Security is supposed to hurry your cheques up and C.E.S. is where you lodge your forms."

"Both give you money e.g. Mum gets widows pension. That's not the same as unemployment."

"Social Security give money to parents to look after your kids and C.E.S. give you money to look after yourself."

This confusion is also borne out in the way the respondents interchangeably call the Department of Social Security and the C.E.S. office 'social service'.

The implications of this lack of knowledge specifically for people receiving unemployment or sickness benefits is that they do not know where to report when there is a problem. The blame for delays in cheques may be placed on the C.E.S. rather than the Department of Social Security. Furthermore the claimant cannot understand the procedure. For instance, the necessity of lodging forms at the C.E.S. office on the correct day in order that the forms be sent to the Department of Social Security.

A more general confusion exists in the minds of the families, regarding the service that they receive from the Department of Social Security and the C.E.S. because of the differential treatment they receive from individual staff members.

The confusion is understandable considering the complex nature of the institutional interdependence of the Department of Social Security and the C.E.S. Furthermore, both the C.E.S. and the Department of Social Security administer the 'work test'.

Theoretically, at least, it has been the C.E.S. as the employment agency which has work-tested the unemployed and then reported on the willingness or otherwise of the unemployed to work to the Department of Social Security as the income support agency. In practice, the responsibilities are not so clear. While it is true that the C.E.S. initially work tests an applicant, the decision to deny benefit is made by the Department of Social Security. In the case of a registrant who is considered to have failed the work test, the C.E.S. must submit a report to the Department of Social Security which includes information on the occupational group of the registrant, the wages and conditions of the offered

job and the registrants reasons for refusing the job. The onus then lies with the Department of Social Security to refuse benefit or deputise a Field Officer to investigate the circumstances of the registrant. The function of these Field Officers is to regularly check on beneficiaries by visiting them in their homes, in effect, work test them and recommend whether or not registrants should be taken off benefit. The recent changes in procedures are moving the Department of Social Security even further from basically being an income support agency. Beneficiaries are now required to advise the Department of Social Security directly 'about any change in circumstances affecting benefit entitlement' and the Department is employing 'more Field Officers to ensure that people who were receiving benefits were legitimately entitled to them'.¹ The C.E.S. continues to refer registrants to jobs, usually by telegram. If the registrant fails to report for a job interview, the C.E.S. is charged with reporting this fact to the Department of Social Security.

There is an inherent conflict between workfare and welfare policies - between an income support policy and a work incentive policy. The consequence of the dichotomy is that there is an inherent ambivalence in our welfare programs between helping and coercing.²

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6. INTERPRETATION AND FRAMEWORK

(a) Direct Action -

One of the goals of the Family Centre Project is 'to provide social action resources and skills to the families so they can generalize their Centre experience to the larger community in order to demand changes in the social policies and institutions which affect their lives'. In late March 1975, the families were provided with another opportunity to develop social action skills. A meeting was organised by a handful of professionals who worked for claimant-based organisations to discuss the problems faced by Social Security beneficiaries. The meeting was held at the Family Centre on March 25, 1975 and was attended by representatives from Ecumenical Migration Centre, Association of Italian Migrant Workers and their Families, Australian Greek Welfare, the Union of the Unemployed and the Family Centre Project. The Family Centre members were the only claimants present at the meeting. It was decided to hold a demonstration at the State Headquarters of the Department of Social Security in Melbourne, and that the demonstration should be a claimant affair, i.e. the professionals should be minimally involved. The representatives from the different organisations were made responsible for informing their claimant groups and encouraging them to participate in the demonstration. A leaflet was prepared for distribution at the demonstration.*

On the March 27, 1975, the day before Easter, the demonstrators convened at the Family Centre. It was decided that a delegation would go to the office of the Victorian Director of Social Security - Mr. A. Kopp, to present the demands contained in the leaflet - while the remainder went to the 9th floor, where the Department of Social Security handles benefit enquiries. The latter group's function was to distribute the leaflets and to encourage other claimants to also personally complain to the Director. The core group of demonstrators consisted of twenty people; a third were claimants and two thirds were welfare professionals. Nearly all the claimant representatives came from the Family Centre Project. The other organisations had informed their claimant groups, but virtually none attended. It was also

* The Leaflet was written in English, Turkish, Greek and Italian.
See Appendix D. p. 109.

found that some Family Centre members refused to participate in the demonstration, although they were sympathetic to 'the cause'.

"We Want Our Rights".

The edited video tape included with this research submission summarizes the major events of the demonstration. There are a number of features which should be noted when viewing the video tape.*

The delegation to the Director's office was indecisive and lacked confidence. The Director, in comparison, seemed cool, rational and reassuring. The interchange with the Director was not productive. In retrospect, at a postmortem on 24th April, there was agreement by the demonstrators that 'we were ill-prepared'. For instance, the group initially did not know the location of the Director's office, nor what he looked like. The group felt that 'Kopp gave us the bureaucratic run-around' and that 'issues which we raised were shelved by Kopp'. The delegation wanted to discuss the issues at a broad policy level while the Director's rebuttal consisted of two statements :

- (a) That cheques were sent within 48 hours of receiving income supplements.
- (b) That to solve the problems, he needed to see individual cases.

In no way did the Director acknowledge to the delegation that there were systematic difficulties associated with income forms reaching the Department of Social Security. For instance, he made the comment :

"They made it easy for people to post their forms into the Department of Commonwealth Employment Service and the people have not been posting them in." *

The Director was implying that most of the difficulties lay with the claimants. It was not until he addressed the beneficiaries

* See video tape: Brotherhood of St Laurence - Family Centre Project, "We want our rights", March 27, 1975.

on the 9th floor that he admitted that problems had occurred within the Department of Social Security, and that the system was being examined.

It should also be noted that when the delegation was joined by other claimants, there was a great deal of confusion and a lack of direction. There was division amongst the ranks about whether to adjourn to another office or to return to the 9th floor. This confusion continued when the Director spoke publicly on the 9th floor. The demonstrators did not take advantage of the situation. By this time, the media had arrived and there was an opportunity for the grievances of the claimants to be broadly publicised. But, the demonstrators did not have speakers prepared to refute the Director, or to make a statement on behalf of the group.¹

Lessons -

The demonstration teaches a number of lessons :

First, it did not achieve any improvements to the social security system. This could not have been expected since the demonstrators did not make any specific requests (the four 'demands' were at a general level). The demonstration could be seen more as a symbolic protest.

It is interesting to compare this demonstration with the activities of another group in Queensland - "Inside Welfare". Inside Welfare is a group of socialist welfare workers, mainly based among social work students at Queensland University 'which on March 26th, 1975 organised an occupation of the ground floor office of the Department of Social Security in Brisbane. The demonstrators were protesting about the departmental treatment of a black woman with five children, two of whom had been fostered, and who was refused supporting mothers benefit. In April 1975, the then Minister for Social Security Mr. Hayden, announced to a delegation that supplementary mothers benefit would be granted. The essential difference between the two groups is that the Brisbane demonstration was concerned with the specific situation of a specific claimant whereas the Melbourne demonstration was concerned with the general situation of all claimants.²

Second, it is difficult to organise a claimant group to protest. Beneficiaries are not a homogeneous group either in terms of needs nor in terms of location. The history of the Union of the Unemployed also points to this. One of the difficulties is the fact that groups change. Because of the Work Test, it is very difficult to remain on unemployment benefits for any length of time.

A benefit is not seen by all people as a right. The community tends to label those in receipt of unemployment benefits as bludgers. These sentiments do little to enhance the desirability of being a beneficiary, let alone forming a group.

Because claimants do not see benefits as a right, they are frightened of the repercussions of protesting. There are certain rights which cannot be taken from individuals such as the amount of the benefit, but there are areas where staff have some discretionary power. The discussion group talking about the C.E.S. mentioned how the staff get to know certain individuals as trouble makers. For instance, one man was told by the Social Security staff member that he was a 'low-priority person' and that he could not be issued with a duplicate cheque.

Welfare claimants such as the Family Centre members have been disenfranchised for such a long time, that they are passive recipients of welfare, and therefore most of them are unlikely to protest their situation.

Finally, the claimants' knowledge of the Social Security system was extremely limited. Their knowledge was based on their first hand experiences, i.e. whether a cheque did or did not arrive. They had no real knowledge of the organisation behind the counter, e.g. how the filing systems functioned, the relationship between different sections, or the procedure for processing an income statement. This internal information is needed if one is to understand why problems occur, and to formulate concrete proposals to improve the system. However, the Department seems unwilling to share this information.

The demonstration at the Department of Social Security could rightly be regarded as an example of the families attempting to generalise their experience to the larger community (the Department of Social Security) by access to power (the Director of Social Security in Victoria) in an attempt to change the structures (Departmental procedures) to meet their own needs (adequate, regular and immediate income). Whether such direct action will increase is a matter for conjecture. Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward have suggested that disruption is politically necessary and inevitable for the poor :

"What political options then exist? When discontent about public policy from time to time arises amongst the poor, new resources and channels must be created - an imperative that inevitably leads to aggressive and deviant action . .

.
the chief point that emerges from this analysis is that low-income people have no regular resources for influencing public policy. It is obvious that they are without power as individuals. Nor are they significant participants in the large formal organisations that keep watch on government, bringing to bear the leverage made possible by organizational stability, staff and money." 3

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(b) EXPECTATIONS

To simply report that results of the questionnaire without interpreting those results could be a mischievous exercise in as much as it does not place the responses within a meaningful and comprehensive context. Nonetheless, this section is speculative, albeit informed, and should be regarded as such.

The concept of relative deprivation and relative expectation has much to offer in analysing the responses of the families.¹ Quite simply, our hypothesis is that, on the whole, the families have low expectations of the Department of Social Security and the C.E.S. and this means that their relationship with both Departments is structured within an 'expectations' context - the lower the expectations the less expected whereas the higher the expectations the more expected.

However, a change in the expectations of the families in relationship with the Department of Social Security and the C.E.S. has already been noted (see p. 29). The families are much more active in their relationship today whereas in the past they were much more passive and reliant on others to be active for them. This increased activity can be seen as a change in expectations - as a movement from low expectations to high expectations :

LOW EXPECTATIONS

HIGH EXPECTATIONS

Contacting the Department of Social Security by telephone.

Personally going into the Department of Social Security.

Lodging an income statement with the C.E.S.

Demanding a job interview.

Deferring problem to social worker.

Personally taking action with assistance of social worker.

Individually protesting treatment.

Collectively demonstrating against treatment.

No longer are families necessarily content to be 'fobbed off' for they have not only recognised that they are being 'fobbed off', but

that there are effective avenues for redress and manipulation of the system.

According to Ted Robert Gurr :

"Relative deprivation is defined as a perceived discrepancy between men's value expectations and their value capabilities. Value expectations are the goods and conditions they think they are capable of attaining or maintaining, given the social means available to them. Societal conditions that increase the average level or intensity of expectations without increasing capabilities increase the intensity of discontent. Among the general conditions that have such effects are the value gains of other groups and the promise of new opportunities. Societal conditions that decrease men's average value position without decreasing their value expectations similarly increase deprivation, hence the intensity of discontent." 2

In terms of the present study the 'goods and conditions' are the families entitlement to adequate income support and to various specific pensions and benefits. We have noted a discernable shift in the attitudes of the families towards these 'goods'. The changed 'societal conditions' effected by the Family Centre Project has promised 'new opportunities' and increased 'capabilities' have had an ambivalent effect - although the personal capabilities of the families to manipulate the system has improved, their increasing contact and knowledge of the system has forcefully demonstrated the inherent structural bias of the system.

Gurr comments :

"The courses of action people have available to them for attaining or maintaining their desired value positions are their value opportunities."

Gurr describes three value opportunities :

Personal opportunities - the individual's inherited and acquired capacities, personal skill and knowledge.

Societal opportunities - the opportunities available for groups and individuals to attain their entitlements and objectives.

Political opportunities - the opportunities available to individuals and groups to induce others to satisfy their entitlements and objectives.³

The objectives of the Family Centre Project can be summarised as follows :

1. To provide considerable resources to a group of poor families so that they can attain power over the social and economic conditions which affect their lives.
2. To provide the facilities and the opportunities for these families to become acquainted with the processes and techniques of decision-making.
3. Through participation in the decision-making process in the Centre to provide families with the skills to change the structure of the Centre.
4. To provide opportunities for the families to determine their own needs and to communicate those needs to the larger community.
5. To provide social action resources and skills to the families so they can generalise their Centre experience to the larger community in order to demand changes in the social policies and institutions which affect their lives.
6. To evaluate the methods used to attain the above objectives, and to collect basic in-depth data about the needs, social conditions and value systems of the families to provide them and the larger community with the power over information which is essential for change.⁴

It can be seen that the Family Centre Project 'merely seeks to demonstrate that, given adequate resources, people can change the condition of their lives, and that provided they have power over these resources, they can alter social structures to meet their own needs. Within the mini-community which is the Project, the families are definitely altering its structures to meet their own needs. For example, pressure from family members resulted in open staff meetings which are now frequently attended by family members. The Project seeks to identify the processes by which these changes are taking place in the hope that they can be generalised to larger communities. The identification of the processes by which people can change the structures of communities to meet their own needs through access to power is so important that it may well be the main thrust of the projected second three-year phase of the Project.'⁵

Over the three year period the families have increasingly developed a confidence in their own ability to affect the conditions of their lives.⁶

The following extract from a meeting at the Family Centre illustrates this development :

A : "How have you been able to make people listen to you?"

B : "I went in and challenged them and they said I was paid right. I said I would not move until they showed me the documents. They got my file and said I was right. I just demanded my rights and got them."

A : "How did you get the confidence to do this?"

B : "I think I decided myself 'I am not going to rely on others all the time.'"

A : "How did the Project help you do this?"

B : "I think because people kept saying to me I could do it."⁷

Later, in the discussion, another family member described her changed attitudes :

"When I first came here I used to be shaking and I let everyone walk over me. It taught me to stand up for myself. If they can see you have a bit of intelligence and information they are willing to listen. The more frightened you are the more they put you down. It was people saying to me 'you can do it'."⁸

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Family Centre Project, Brotherhood of St Laurence,
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Benn discusses the "difficulty of moving low-income people from an interest in services to meet their individual needs to an interest in collective action" and suggests there are three main factors responsible for this (a) "isolation from other low-income people", (b) "lack of consciousness that they form part of a large enough group to force change" and (c) "the time required to fully realise the social and psychological benefits of participation and redistribution of resources."

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(c) PARTICIPATION

The participation of the poor in government administration is dependent on the responsiveness of government administration.

As George J. Szablowski suggests :

"Prescriptive theories stressing participant democratic values often neglect to take into account the fact that participation is impossible without responsiveness. To speak of participation, therefore, presumes a degree of responsiveness on the part of the something 'out there'.¹

To assume that the creation of participative opportunities will automatically create participation is an assumption that ignores the reality of participation. First, participation is a learnt experience and the creation of opportunities is useless unless people know how to use these opportunities. Second, participation without power is tokenism and unless people make real decisions then participative opportunities will be ignored. The creation or absence of learning opportunities and participation with power is the difference between meaningful and meaningless responsiveness by government departments.²

As Richard A. Cloward and Richard M. Elman have argued :

"Tyranny is not so likely to take root when men have access to information. The authoritarianism of social welfare agencies, is partly made possible by the pervasive ignorance they engender in their clientele. Where ignorance prevails, myths arise to explain what otherwise seems arbitrary and capricious. It is believed by some on the dole that welfare workers get fifty dollars for each case they can close, for how else is one to understand the hundreds of instances in which recipients are discharged from the rolls for no apparent reason (e.g. 'failed to comply with departmental regulations')? Myths serve to order reality, but they also reinforce ignorance of it. And because recipients do not understand administrative decisions, officials can dismiss complaints out of hand. By converting issues of justice into instances of ignorance, attacks upon the rules are thus deflected and the system remains intact. One can grant the low education of recipients without supposing that this goes far toward explaining their failure to grasp the workings of the apparatus upon which they depend for survival. Ignorance is the product of the system itself."³

It is this system ignorance which characterised the families participation in the demonstration at the Department of Social Security and which characterises their relationship with govern-

ment administration. The families 'failure to grasp the workings of the apparatus' is easily dismissed as the demands of the unknowing and their situation is ignored. Lacking a 'sophisticated' and 'rational' explanation the families have, instead, grievances which are regarded as childish and immature.⁴

As Lewis Lipsitz has argued :

"The most vaguely developed aspect of poor people's (and most people's political views is likely to be the area of explanation - why things happen and don't happen; who opposes what and why; how things can be changed. It is in this area that the linkage is made between personal grievances and political action. Without such a like, the grievances may remain inchoate or feebly articulated."⁵

In agreeing with Lipsitz we would like to suggest :

- First : Low-income people have many grievances concerning what the government does and what it does not do.
- Second : We should not expect low-income people to have a developed explanation of what is wrong and what they want to see government do or stop doing.
- Third : The grievances of low-income people are as politically relevant as developed political philosophies and articulated issues.
- Finally : In understanding the ideas and demands of low-income people we need to focus on their grievances.⁶

Thus, in essence, this research reports the grievances of a group of low-income people who have had lengthy and substantial experience with the Department of Social Security and the C.E.S. The recommendations for change are geared to their specific experiences (rude staff, long waiting periods, inadequate benefits) and they cannot be expected to make recommendations which depend on a comprehensive understanding of administrative procedures nor could they be expected to comment on such abstract notions as an ombudsman and an administrative review tribunal.⁷ For the poor live in the here and now of food, shelter, clothing and jobs and not in the possible and maybe of reform, social change and political activism.

There is a danger that reforms may in fact not be directed at the

fundamental problem, the orientation of the government department, but rather be directed at deflecting pressure for change by focussing on the low-income group, as if the low-income group were the problem.

Michael Lipsky has suggested that the solution to citizen grievances and problems is not in the provision of specialised rehabilitative units such as a Social Work service :

"Still another institutional mechanism resulting in reducing pressures on the general system is the 'special unit' designed to respond to particularly intense client complaints. Illustrations may be found in the establishment of police review boards, human relations units of public agencies, black studies departments or curricula, and public agency emergency services. The establishment of such units, whether or not they perform their manifest functions, also works to take bureaucracies 'off the hook' by making it appear that something is being done about problems. However, usually in these cases the problems about which clients want something done (police brutality, equitable school curricula, housing inspections and repairs) are related to general Street-level Bureaucrats to allege that problems are being handled and provide a 'place' in the bureaucracy where particularly vociferous and persistent complainants can be referred. At the same time, the existence of the units deflects pressure for general reorientations."⁸

Social Work service in the eyes of the families who use the service is to sort out problems experienced with the payment section, (see p. 37 - 38). The families perception of the present role of the Social Work services concurs with the views of the Department of Social Security's own social workers :

"Until recently our primary purpose in the department has been to assist beneficiaries with problems arising from, or contributing to, their invalidity, unemployment, widowhood etc. In the course of the work we are constantly reminded of the importance to beneficiaries of their social security payments. In fact, we feel that this importance, in terms of personal security and well-being cannot be over-estimated."⁹

Applying Lipsky, one might suggest that the future role of the service could eventually be used by the Department of Social Security to manage tension and to protect the Department from malcontents :

"The social worker is a double-agent; while claiming to be

working on behalf of the client, he is usually an agent of socio-political control, bolstering the existing social order by reinforcing and interpreting morals, social and politic rules." 10

Whatever else their function, the resources of the Social Work service could be geared to defusing the dissatisfied client.

The problem of administrative responsiveness is common to all government departments.¹¹ But, as with most things, the unresponsiveness of administration is felt most by the low-income group whose very survival is dependent on the responsiveness of the government departments.¹²

Peter Blau has suggested that :

"By supplying services in demand to others, a person establishes power over them. If he regularly renders needed services they cannot readily obtain elsewhere, others become dependent on and obligated to him for these services, and unless they can furnish other benefits to him that produce interdependence by making him equally dependent on them, their unilateral dependence obligates them to comply with his requests lest he ceases to continue to meet their needs." 13

Not only can government departments force low-income groups to be dependent they also ensure that these groups remain disadvantaged. Sjoberg, Brymer and Farris argue that government departments 'frequently reinforce the class structure of the community'¹⁴ and that the :

"Evidence indicates that modern bureaucracies, especially client-centred ones, stand between lower-class and upper-status (particularly middle-class) persons. These groups do not encounter one another within a vacuum but rather within an organisational, bureaucratic context. Even when they meet in relatively informal situations, the bureaucratic orientation of the middle-class person structures his response to the lower-class individual. It is through their

positions in the key bureaucracies that the higher-status groups maintain their social advantages and even at times foster bureaucratic procedures that impede the advancement of lower-class persons into positions of privilege." 15.

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This is not to suggest however, that the problem is one dimensional. As Lovejoy and Bridges argue in discussing the results of a survey :

"Results suggest that continued poverty will result from these respondents' general lack of knowledge of what programs are available, their reluctance to use some of them and their inability to cope with the administrative processes involved. The lack of material resources, self-confidence, initiative and education which has made it difficult for them to cope with the economy proves also to be a hindrance to their coping with the social welfare system."

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In addition we do recognise "that low-income families may have any number of personal, psychological or interactive difficulties or 'problems'" *, but would suggest firstly, these problems may be caused by the circumstances of poverty and secondly, these problems may be irrelevant to the circumstances of poverty.

The paper is concerned with developing an instrument "to enable the measureable assessment of some specific and central aspects of the families' circumstances, and to provide a view both of the Project's achievement in specific areas, and of the overall development of each family." *

* Extracted from an untitled paper by Michael Liffman, Research Officer, Family Centre Project, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.

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The survey was conducted in Milwaukee during the summer of 1970. In all 313 white interviews and 241 black interviews were completed. The survey asked, if 'within the last couple of years', they had personally written a letter, sent a telegram, or spoken et cetera.

Eisinger concluded that 'for citizens to attempt to contact their government often means to embark on a difficult and frustrating course. To do so requires a substantial effort of will, great persistence, and limited expectations of gratification'.

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7. CONCLUSION

There needs to be a clear policy decision by the Government requiring government departments and statutory agencies to establish mechanisms by which accountability to claimants can be assured and implemented. Elliott Krause has suggested there is a difference between the client group and the target group of a government department,¹ and we think this differentiation has applicability to the Department of Social Security and the C.E.S. In general terms, the Departments' clients are the middle-class who legislate functions, funds and staff for serving the Departments' target group whereas the target group is the low-income group. The departments are accountable to the non-poor middle-class dominated Parliament specifically through non-poor middle-class Ministers.

This is a pity for by denying such participation the Departments are depriving themselves of an invaluable input and source of information. We would, however, suggest that the basis of such an input has already been established with the experimental Welfare Rights program initiated by the former Minister for Social Security Mr. Hayden. The scheme is being piloted in Victoria and N.S.W. where there are ten Welfare Rights officers funded by the Department of Social Security but employed by ten welfare agencies.²

As low-income people are less organised than middle-class people it is less easy to find and invite official low-income representatives to join claimant boards. There are, however, several essentially low-income organisations which could in fact be invited to elect or nominate representatives, including the Family Centre Project, the Housing Commission Tenants Union and the Association of Italian Migrant Workers and their Families. The representativeness of the low-income representatives should not really be at issue for low-income representatives would at least, be low-income.

The over-riding purpose of the Welfare Rights program is to firstly, 'disseminate information on welfare benefits and entitlements and to facilitate a two way flow of information - by giving out information about Social Security benefits and by feeding back information, which can be used to develop better methods of communication and services', and to secondly 'take up an advocacy role, between a client and an Australian or State Government

department or private organisations such as financial institutions, employers or trade unions'.³ Although on a much broader perspective, the Family Centre Project has also been concerned with the dissemination of information and with facilitating a two-way flow between claimants and the Department of Social Security and the C.E.S. and the Project's Resource Workers could easily be called Welfare Rights officers. (See p.26, 40a Ref:6). We have noted that the role of the Resource Workers has changed and this is directly linked with a change in the expectations of the families (see p. 65 - 68). Over the three years of the Family Centre Project the families have developed a confidence in themselves and the fact that they have been able to do so has been dependent on the role of the staff of the Family Centre. The demonstration at the Department of Social Security was a clear indication of this development (see p. 58.).

We suggest the Welfare Rights program should be continued and expanded. We envisage the establishment of a series of claimants advisory boards attached to the regional, state and federal offices of the Department of Social Security and the C.E.S. and that membership of these boards would primarily be comprised of the Welfare Rights officers and claimants attached to welfare and self-help groups. The effectiveness of the boards would depend, however, on each regional, state and federal board having :

- (a) Support staff responsible to and appointed by them,
- (b) Access to all information relevant to their deliberations,
- and (c) Real power to compel department officials to appear before them and answer questions.

Composition of three quarters of the boards at least at regional level should be comprised of claimants and Welfare Rights officers. State and federal boards would be comprised of representatives from the regional boards. Meetings of the boards should be open to the public and verbatim transcripts of meetings should be available to interested groups and individuals.

The claimants boards would have an initiatory function in as much as they could decide to investigate certain issues, but they should

also have a consultative function by which proposed changes to legislation, regulations and administrative procedures would be automatically referred to them for comment. This process would probably include publication of a white paper, a minimum time period to allow for the preparation of comment and a public inquiry into the proposed changes. These procedures would have to be established by legislation and would also have to allow for interested groups and individuals to participate in the consultation process.⁴

We have noted that the families knowledge of the Department of Social Security and the C.E.S. is vague and confused (see p.35-38, 48, 50-51, and 54-56.) and that not surprisingly their recommendations for change (see p.38-40 and 51-53) are grievance-oriented and that this does not make their recommendations any less valid or real (see p.71).

This would suggest the need for more and better information. Information programs should not, however, be solely based on the communication of decisions but also on encouraging citizen involvement in the making of those decisions. The proposed Freedom of Information Bill should make a useful contribution in freeing information.⁵

Individual claimants should have access to their files and the opportunity to photocopy those files. This would require the provision of a supervised reading room with free photocopying equipment. It is very difficult to appeal against a decision when you are ignorant of the basis upon which that decision was made.

The establishment of the Social Security Appeals Tribunal early in 1975 represents an important advance on the previous situation in which claimants had a statutory right of appeal against decisions of the Department of Social Security to the Director-General of Social Security who could 'affirm, vary or annul its determination, directive, decision or approval'. But, the appeal system was within the Department. At least, with the Social Security Appeals Tribunal two of the three members are from outside the Department. However, the Tribunal does not in itself make decisions but makes recommendations to the Director-General of Social Security who makes the decisions. The Social Security Appeals Tribunal should be given the power to determine appeals. As the Appeals Tribunal was

established subsequent to the survey it was not possible to question the families on its effectiveness which would have been most difficult given the Tribunals short history.

An anomaly with the new appeals system is that claimants are provided with an appeal form to register their appeal, but no formal procedure has been established to provide claimants with a copy of their appeal. At least, photocopies of the appeal should be given to claimants as a matter of course. Furthermore, there is no established procedure to enable claimants to obtain copies of reports made on them by the C.E.S. when it is felt that they have failed the work test or when Field Officers from the Department of Social Security have filed reports on claimants. Copies of these reports should automatically be available to claimants.

In their contact with the Department of Social Security and the C.E.S. the families have often experienced what can only be described as a 'fobbing off' process. (See p. 27 - 29). Queries are brushed off, deflected and evaded by assurances that cheques are in the mail. The subsequent non-appearance of the cheque has eventually revealed that despite the assurance to the contrary, the cheque had not in fact, been posted. Officers of the Department had in fact either given the inquirer an off-the-cuff assurance without checking the facts and, presumably, assumed that the system would right itself or they have not been able to discover the inquirers file and rather than admit to this they have sought to reassure the caller again, presumably, on the assumption, that the system would sort itself out. In giving evidence to the Royal Commission on Government Administration, social workers in the Department of Social Security (Perth) have suggested that :

"In seeking benefit information on behalf of clients, all social workers have had experience of inaccuracies, delays and lack of courtesy as a result of the difficulty in locating files." 6

We cannot propose a remedy for this situation other than to point it out, the unnecessary hardship it causes and the concurring views of departmental staff on the recurrence of these problems. We have already quoted the Director-General of the Department of Social Security Mr. L. J. Daniels as saying the Department attempts

to train officers who can 'offer helpful information and advice' (see p. 34). It is the families experience too often the information is not provided and the advice is not helpful.

Departmental staff have, however, made various recommendations for improving the efficiency of the Departments, but as outsiders the families could not be expected to comment on the merits of the various proposals. Their knowledge of the system is too limited due to departmental secrecy and complexity.

The survey reveals that delayed cheques are a major problem (see p.20-21), and that the procedure of obtaining replacements (see p. 23) and gaining entitlements is incredibly complicated and frustrating (see p. 28 - 29). On the basis of the survey, we cannot demonstrate that abolition of the seven day waiting period would help the families, but our experience of the consequences of its retention, demonstrates that its abolition would help the families, but what we can say is that there are administrative and processing delays which, although understandable, cause hardship and the Family Centre has had to finance families who would otherwise be destitute (see p. 24).

Quite clearly, however, the families are appreciative of the situation of the staff (see p. 32). As Michael Lipsky suggests, street-level bureaucrats have insufficient organisational resources and this increases pressures on them to 'make quick decisions about clients and process cases with inadequate information and too little time to dispose of problems on their merits'.⁷

This lack of resources would, in part, explain the 'fobbing off' process. In part, staff 'fob off' families because they lack information and they have too little time to help in the resolution of problems. Part of the answer to this would seem to be in the development of better training programs, but again, neither we nor the families are in a position to present a detailed critique of existing training programs.

The client of an organisation can change and the target group can, in fact, become the client group. Up to the present, the client group of the Department of Social Security and the C.E.S. has been the middle-class whereas the target group has been the low-income beneficiaries and pensioners. The beneficiaries and

pensioners have been slowly assuming the role of claimants and in doing so claiming a redefinition of their role with the Department. What this amounts to is that the target group is claiming client status.

It is to be expected that these claims will continue and that it will be difficult for the Departments to reconcile the claims of competing clients. We can be sure that the pressure for change and opposition to change will intensify and the outcome, although speculative, is quite crucial.

In conclusion, it is our experience that a guaranteed minimum income is a necessary precondition to enable families and individuals to plan and improve their life style. Any guaranteed income must be responsive to the changing needs of families and individuals. The crucial issue about a guaranteed minimum income, however, is its adequacy and whether it is based on subsistence standards or not.

The provision of income security is a necessary prerequisite to claimant participation in Government Administration. The hungry cannot survive on ideas.⁸

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2. For information on the Welfare Rights program see :

Press statement by the Minister for Social Security, Mr. Bill Hayden, on Welfare Rights program, May 1st, 1975, WGH/53.

Press statement by the Minister for Social Security, Mr. Bill Hayden, on first Welfare Rights Worker appointed. September 13, 1974. WGH/88

See also :
ERNST, John A. J. Participation: a study of welfare consumer groups in Australia, Australian Social Welfare Commission, (undated).
3. "Press statement by the Minister . . .". WGH/53

4. We are not entirely oblivious to the Office of Economic Opportunity War on Poverty in the U.S.A. and 'maximum feasible participation', but the objectives of the 'war' were undefined and the definitions changed according to who was doing the defining. Our proposals have two essential elements. Firstly, they attempt to be realistic and do not pretend to be what they are not. Secondly, it is important that this is understood and the function of the claimant advisory boards be carefully spelt out by the government. For some criticisms of the Office of Economic Opportunity 'War on Poverty' and for pitfalls we need to avoid and our proposals attempt to avoid :

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KRAVITZ, Sanford. "The community action program in perspective" in BLOOMBERG Jr., Warner. and SCHMANDT, Henry J. Power, poverty and urban policy, Vol. 2., Urban affairs annual reviews Sage Publications, Inc. Beverly Hills, California, 1968, p. 313 - 354.

5. Proposed Freedom of Information Legislation, report of Inter-departmental Committee, September 1974, Attorney-General's Department.

For comments by staff of the Department of Social Security on the public need for information :

HAYES, Suzanne J. "Relationship of the Australian public service and statutory corporations and other authorities with the Parliament, Ministers and community" Submission to the Royal Commission on Government Administration, Submission No. 309, p. 1 - 3.

SOCIAL WORKERS OF THE HEAD OFFICE IN PERTH, WESTERN AUSTRALIA, Statement of evidence, for presentation to the Royal Commission on Australian Government Administration, November 15, 1974, Submission No. 416, p. 11, 12 - 13.

6. SOCIAL WORKERS OF THE HEAD OFFICE IN PERTH, WESTERN AUSTRALIA, 'Statement of . . .' p. 8.

For a discussion on prejudiced attitudes by staff of the Department of Social Security, Sydney, towards ethnic and minority groups :

HAYES, Suzanne J. "Relationship of . . .", p. 9.

For a defence of the 'front-line official' and 'the constraints within which the social security or unemployment service officials have to work' :

PICTON, Cliff. "Social Security and the long-term unemployed: some issues for staff training" in Social Security Quarterly, Vol. 2., No. 2., Spring 1974, p. 10 - 14.

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DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SECURITY, "Management workshops on 'The needs of our clients'", Kalarama, 3rd - 8th March 1974, Workshop plenary session:

For a suggestion that one of the problems of organisation within the Department of Social Security is the dual management-benefit ability roles of registrars :

CONFERENCE OF REGIONAL OFFICERS, The role of the regional registrar as a manager, Department of Social Security, South Australia and Northern Territory, Adelaide, March 1974.

It is argued that the original concept of registrars 'placed the emphasis on the performance of benefit functions, and selection of officers was made on the basis of benefit ability rather than on management skills'. The prediction is made that the registrar's role :

"in the future will 'place greater emphasis on management'. The complexities of the Act make it impracticable for one person to have a thorough knowledge of all it contains, and to be able to master perhaps one area and have a working knowledge of the others is probably the best which can be expected of any one person' and that 'failure to recognise this will, in my opinion, force those offices into difficulties because of spasmodic management correcting rather than directing the course of events".

and that :

"One of the most common causes of loss of management control occurs because the Registrar has not set up satisfactory

lines of communication between himself and his on-line supervisors (staff). Often potentially difficult situations are not recognised because the on-line supervisor has not been directed to look for them on a regular basis, or no easy means of reporting to the Registrar has been evolved. It is important to recognise that the officers involved daily in particular tasks are in the best position to know the state of work in their area. The difficulty is in providing them with a means of transmitting this information to someone who has displayed an ability to act on the information given."

For evidence by staff of the Department of Social Security on the inefficiency of the Department :

ROYAL COMMISSION ON AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION,
Transcript of proceedings at Brisbane on Tuesday, 4th February 1975, at 10.35 a.m., p. 1331 - 1341

Transcript of proceedings at Townsville on Thursday, 6th February 1975, at 10.00 a.m., p. 1352 - 1374.

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8. SALMON, Jan. Resources for poor families: an experimental income supplement scheme, Australian Government Commission of Inquiry into Poverty, Canberra, 1974. In particular p. 82 - 83.

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FRIEDMAN, Milton. Capitalism and freedom, The University of Chicago Press, 1962.

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APPENDIX A:

RESEARCH PROPOSAL -

ROYAL COMMISSION ON AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION

BROTHERHOOD OF ST LAURENCE - FAMILY CENTRE PROJECT

APPLICATION FOR FUNDS FOR A RESEARCH SUBMISSION

An analysis of Clients' perception of
Government Welfare Services.

A. DESCRIPTION OF FAMILY CENTRE PROJECT

The Family Centre Project is an experimental programme which provides facilities and staff to enable 60 very poor families to improve their own social condition. The programme is activities - rather than problem - oriented, and activities are decided by the families according to their own expressed needs and through a participatory process. The staff are multi-disciplinary and are regarded as resource personnel for the families; they include two research workers.

The Family Centre Project has four underlying basic concepts: power over resources, power over information, power over decision-making and power over relationships. The work of the staff is geared to assisting the families to gain power in all these areas in order to meet the objectives of the project which are listed below:

1. To provide considerable resources to a group of poor families, so that they can attain power over the social and economic conditions which affect their lives.
2. To provide the facilities and the opportunities for these families to become acquainted with the processes and techniques of decision-making.

3. Through participation in the decision-making process in the Centre to provide families with the skills to change the social structure of the Centre.
4. To provide opportunities for the families to determine their own needs and to communicate those needs to the larger community.
5. To provide social action resources and skills to the families, so they can generalize their Centre experience to the larger community in order to demand changes in the social policies and institutions which affect their lives.
6. To evaluate the methods used to attain the above objectives, and to collect basic in-depth data about the needs, social conditions and value systems of the families to provide them and the larger community with the power over information which is essential for change.

The method of allocating staff as resource personnel was based on the many commonsocial characteristics of the families, e.g. low income, poor housing, poor educational opportunities and employment difficulties etc. A staff member is assigned to each of these areas in which the families are disadvantaged; consequently there is a resource staff member for housing, for health, for education, for employment etc. It is planned that each staff member will serve as a nucleus and gradually involve volunteers and family members in their resource area. In this way it is hoped knowledge and expertise will gradually be transferred to family members, and that they will eventually control the work and simply use the staff member as a consultant.

B. RESEARCH RATIONALE

The sixty families have had extensive contact with Commonwealth Departments, especially the Department of Social Security and the Commonwealth Employment Service. Indeed the families are frequently dependent on these departments for their livelihood. Thus the Family Centre Project offers the unique opportunity to gather clients' opinions regarding service delivery. Client evaluation is frequently overlooked, and even when it is undertaken it is difficult to gain an honest opinion ... many clients would fear the repercussions of criticizing a department.

Furthermore, the families can offer a valuable contribution in terms of day-to-day operations of these departments and the implications of policies on their lives.

Methodology

1. Interviews will be conducted with all family members regarding their experiences and attitudes to the Department of Social Security and the Commonwealth Employment Service and how it has affected their lives.
2. An interview schedule will be developed out of current Family Centre Project knowledge and selected reading.
3. As families have dealings with the departments, their experiences will be documented in depth. In this way the problems of collecting information based on memory will be minimized.
4. From the material obtained by interview and documentation, discussion groups will be arranged to discuss what recommendations should be made to the Royal Commission. It is possible that these discussions could be video-taped.

It is envisaged that the report would be completed by the end of March 1975.

C. ANTICIPATED EXPENDITURE

David Griffiths - Social Policy Officer, Social Issues Department. Collation of data and report writing -	\$ 524.10
Jan Salmon - Research Worker. Co-ordination of research, design of interview schedule, data analysis -	\$ 500.00
Use of resources of Family Centre, administrative costs, use of equipment, telephone, transport costs, training of interviewers -	\$ 500.00
Payment to four interviewers at \$4.00 per hour -	\$ 480.00
Five video tapes -	\$ 35.00
Postage -	\$ 28.00
Typing and preparation of Submission -	\$ 100.00
Total anticipated expenditure -	<u>\$2,167.10</u>

D. CONCLUSION

In Information Paper No. 1/74, the Royal Commission on Government

Administration notes that:-

"One of the major deficiencies of contemporary Government administration, around the world, is that they seem to become more isolated, from the people they serve. Information about the affairs of Government is often deficient in terms of being available in an attractive, intelligible form for the people who need it.

The Commission intends to explore fully the relationship of the Australian Government administration to the public, both through studies of the supply of information and the interaction of Government officers with the public. It will aim, through submissions, hearings, visits and surveys, to establish the basis for possible recommendations in areas where administrative services to the public can be improved."

We anticipate that few low-income people will themselves make representations to the Royal Commission, and therefore this will be a unique client-oriented submission from a low-income group. The 60 families will become subjects in their own right, speaking for themselves about their experiences with Government departments.

APPENDIX B:

QUESTIONNAIRE

CODE NUMBER

BROTHERHOOD OF ST LAURENCE

PUBLIC SERVICE ENQUIRY INTERVIEW

We are trying to find out if people are satisfied with the service they get from some Government Departments. We are particularly interested in the Department of Social Security and the Commonwealth Employment Service. With the information we get from you, we are going to write a report for the Enquiry into the Public Service, but no names will be mentioned. Your opinion, therefore, could help to change these Departments.

SECTION A.

1. Have you heard about the Social Security Department?
(check to see if they know about "pensions office", if they say no).
Yes ☐
No ☐
(if no, go to question 16).
2. Who told you about the Social Security (Pension) Department?
Family ☐
Friends ☐
Letters from the Department ☐
Articles in Newspapers ☐
Social Workers ☐
Doctor ☐
Police ☐
Courts ☐
Minister of Religion ☐
Hospitals ☐
Other..... ☐
..... ☐
..... ☐
3. How long have you known about the Department?
(record answer in months or years)
.....
4. Have you or your husband/wife ever applied for a pension or benefit?
Yes ☐
No ☐
(If no, go to question 9).

5.	Who applied?	Husband <input type="checkbox"/> Wife <input type="checkbox"/>	Husband <input type="checkbox"/> Wife <input type="checkbox"/>	Husband <input type="checkbox"/> Wife <input type="checkbox"/>
6.	What sort of pension or benefit did he/she/you apply for?	Widow's Pension <input type="checkbox"/> Invalid Pension <input type="checkbox"/> Supporting Mothers' Pension <input type="checkbox"/> Special Benefit <input type="checkbox"/> Unemployment Benefit <input type="checkbox"/> Sickness Benefit <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
7.	When did you/he/she last apply?	In last 3 months <input type="checkbox"/> 4-6 months ago <input type="checkbox"/> 7-12 months ago <input type="checkbox"/> 1-2 years ago <input type="checkbox"/> 3-4 years ago <input type="checkbox"/> 5+ years ago <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
8.	Did you/he/she receive it?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
	(If no) a. Why not? b. Why did you/he/she think that you/they would be entitled to a pension/benefit? (Find out who told the person & when they were told).			
	(If yes) a. How did you/he/she know you/they were entitled to a pension/benefit? (Find out who told the person & when they were told).			

b. On this occasion how long did it take for the first pension/benefit cheque to arrive?	2 weeks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	3-4 weeks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	1-2 months	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	3-6 months	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	7-12 months	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	12+ months	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Other.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
			
			
			
c. Are you/he/she still receiving this pension/benefit?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

9. When did you or your husband/wife last go to a Social Security (Pension) Office?

During last week	<input type="checkbox"/>
1 week ago	<input type="checkbox"/>
2 - 4 weeks ago	<input type="checkbox"/>
1 - 3 months ago	<input type="checkbox"/>
4 - 6 months ago	<input type="checkbox"/>
7 - 12 months ago	<input type="checkbox"/>
1 - 2 years ago	<input type="checkbox"/>
3+ years ago	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other.....	<input type="checkbox"/>
.....	<input type="checkbox"/>

(If never, go to question 14).

10. Who went?

Husband	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wife	<input type="checkbox"/>

11. Why did you/he/she go?

.....
.....
.....
.....

12. How did the staff treat you/him/her? (Find out in detail if they were helpful, polite, rude etc.).

.....
.....
.....
.....

13. Did they solve your problem?

Yes ☐

No ☐

(If yes)

a. How did they solve your problem?

.....
.....
.....
.....

(If no)

b. What did you do then?

.....
.....
.....
.....

14. Do you know what services are offered by the Department of Social Security?

Yes ☐

No ☐

(If no) a. Why not?

.....
.....
.....
.....

(If yes) a. What are they?

.....
.....
.....
.....

b. Do you understand how to go about getting these services?

Yes ☐
No ☐

15. Did you know that the Social Security Department provides -

	Yes	No
a. widow's pension	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. supporting mothers benefit	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. invalid pension	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. unemployment benefits	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. sickness benefits	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. social work service	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. child endowment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h. rehabilitation allowance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
i. special benefits	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

16. What improvements could be made to the Social Security Department?

.....
.....
.....
.....

SECTION B.

17. Have you heard about the Commonwealth Employment Service?

Yes ☐

No ☐

(If no, mention the Commonwealth Office which deals with
Employment. - If still no, go to question 26).

18. Who told you about the Commonwealth Employment Service?

Family ☐

Friends ☐

Letters from the Department ☐

Articles in Newspapers ☐

Social Workers ☐

Doctors ☐

Police ☐

Courts ☐

Ministers of Religion ☐

Hospitals ☐

Other..... ☐

..... ☐

..... ☐

19. When did you or your wife/husband last go to a Commonwealth
Employment Office?

during last week ☐

1 week ago ☐

2 - 4 weeks ago ☐

1 - 3 months ago ☐

4 - 6 months ago ☐

7 - 12 months ago ☐

1 - 2 years ago ☐

3+ years ago ☐

Never ☐

(If never) go to question 23.

20. Why did you/he/she go?

.....

.....

.....

.....

21. How did the staff treat you/her/him?

.....
.....
.....
.....

22. Did they solve your problem?

Yes ☐

No ☐

(If yes)

a. How did they solve your problem?

.....
.....
.....
.....

(If no)

b. What did you do then?

.....
.....
.....
.....

23. Do you know about the services offered by the Commonwealth Employment Service?

Yes ☐

No ☐

(If no) a. Why not

.....
.....
.....

(If yes) a. What are they?

.....
.....
.....

b. Do you understand how to go about getting these services?

Yes ☐
No ☐

24. Do you know that the Commonwealth Employment Services provide -

- | | |
|------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. Advice regarding employment | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. Application for unemployment benefits | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. Application for sickness benefits | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. Retraining scheme | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e. Vocational guidance | <input type="checkbox"/> |

25. What improvements could be made to the Commonwealth Employment Service?

.....
.....
.....
.....

SECTION C.

26. In your dealings with the Social Security Department or Commonwealth Employment Service, have you or your husband/wife ever had a pension or benefit cheque fail to arrive?

Yes ☐
No ☐

(If no) go to question 27.

(If yes) a. When was the last time?

0 - 6 months ago	<input type="checkbox"/>
7 - 12 months ago	<input type="checkbox"/>
1+ year ago	<input type="checkbox"/>

b. What sort of cheque was it?

Widow's Pension	<input type="checkbox"/>
Invalid Pension	<input type="checkbox"/>
Supporting Mothers benefit	<input type="checkbox"/>
Special Benefit	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unemployment Benefit	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sickness Benefit	<input type="checkbox"/>
Child Endowment	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other.....	

.....
.....
..... ☐

c. What did you do?

.....
.....
.....
.....

d. How long did it take for the cheque to arrive?

Received a counter cheque	<input type="checkbox"/>
Within a week	<input type="checkbox"/>
Waited a week	<input type="checkbox"/>
Waited 2 weeks	<input type="checkbox"/>
Waited 3 weeks	<input type="checkbox"/>
Waited 4 weeks	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never got it	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	

.....
.....
.....
..... ☐

27, Do you know the difference between the Department of Social Security and the Commonwealth Employment Service?

Yes ☐
No ☐

(If yes) What are the differences?

.....
.....
.....
.....

SECTION D.

28. Have you heard of the Regional Social Security Offices?
(If no, find out if they have heard about Social Security
Offices in the suburbs. N.B. Make sure people are not
confusing those offices with the Commonwealth Employment
Office or Regional Social Welfare Offices).

Yes ☐

No ☐

(If no) go to question 30.

29. (If yes) a. How did you hear about them?

Family ☐

Friends ☐

Letters from the Department ☐

Articles in newspapers ☐

Social workers ☐

Doctors ☐

Police ☐

Courts ☐

Ministers of Religion ☐

Hospitals ☐

Other.....

.....

..... ☐

- b. Have you ever gone there? Why?

.....
.....
.....
.....

c. What did you think of the service?

.....
.....
.....
.....

d. What improvements could be made to this service?

.....
.....
.....
.....

SECTION E.

30. Have you ever seen a Social Worker in the Social Security Department?

Yes ☐

No ☐

(If no go to c.)

(If yes) a. Why?

.....
.....

b. What improvements could be made to this service?

.....
.....
.....
.....

(If no) c. Why not?

.....
.....

1. Name of person interviewed :

.....

2. Age of person interviewed :

Years

15 - 20

21 - 30

31 - 40

41 - 50

51 & over

3. Age of spouse :

15 - 20

21 - 30

31 - 40

41 - 50

51 & over

4. Name of Interviewer :

5. Date of interview :

6. Code Number :

THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP

APPENDIX C :

THE FAMILY CENTRE PROJECT :

The literature on the Project is extensive :

BENN, Concetta. A new developmental model for social work, paper presented to Australian Association of Social Workers Confernece, 1975.

BROTHERHOOD OF ST LAURENCE, Project Report: BENN, Concetta.
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LIFFMAN, Michael. Boots and bootstraps : a discussion paper on some aspects of poverty, Melbourne, Brotherhood of St Laurence, 1975.

SALMON, Jan. Resources for poor families: an experimental income supplement scheme, Australian Government Commission of Inquiry into Poverty, Canberra, 1974.

SALMON, Jan. Passing the buck: an Australian guaranteed minimum income scheme, Paper presented to the Australian Council of Social Service seminar on the guaranteed minimum income, 23rd May, 1975.

SALMON, Jan. BENN, Concetta. BROWN, Jill. and CROSS, Ann. Never had a chance, Australian Government Commission of Inquiry into Poverty - Education. (Yet to be published).

WE WANT OUR RIGHTS

MR. KOPP: WE DEMAND OUR PAY AS REGULARLY AS YOU GET YOURS.

Those of us receiving Benefits are protesting against the inadequate and unsatisfactory treatment we are receiving from the Department of Social Security and the Department of Labour.

We demand to see Mr. Kopp to discuss with him:

1. cutting the delay in processing and mailing cheques
2. better, more understanding service, and more care taken of files, certificates and other documents
3. emergency cash for those in urgent need
4. interpreters available for migrants.

It is important for all people wanting their to Social Service Benefits to support and join in this protest.

THESE ARE YOUR RIGHTS - NO ONE CAN TAKE THEM AWAY FROM YOU!

ΕΠΙΘΥΜΟΥΜΑΙ ΤΑ ΔΙΚΑΙΩΜΑΤΑ ΜΑΣ

ΚΥΡΙΕ ΚΟΠΠ: ΑΠΑΙΤΟΥΜΑΙ ΤΟΝ ΜΙΣΘΟΝ ΜΑΣ ΟΠΩΣ ΚΙ
ΕΞΥ ΠΡΟΣΛΑΜΒΑΝΕΙΣ.

Όλοι που δικαιούμεθα χρηματική βοήθεια (Benefits) από τα διάφορα Δημόσια Ταμεία, διαμαρτυρούμεθα με τον ανεπαρκή και δυσάρεστο τρόπον που μας μεταχειρίζονται.

Απαιτούμαι συνάντηση με τον κ. Kopp όπως συζητάουμε:

- 1) Η πληρωμή να γίνεται σύντομα και χωρίς καθυστερήσεις.
- 2) Να υπάρχει εξυπηρέτηση και σύστημα στις υπηρεσίες, ώστε να μην χάνονται οι αιτήσεις, πιστοποιητικά κι έγγραφα.
- 3) Χρηματική βοήθεια άνευ καθυστερήσεως για επείγουσες περιπτώσεις.
- 4) Διευκρινείς για την εξυπηρέτηση των μεταναστών.

Όλοι που ενδιαφέρονται και προσλαμβάνουν βοήθειαν από τα Δημόσια Ταμεία (Social Service Benefits), θα πρέπει να υποστηρίξουν την διαμαρτυρίαν αυτήν.

ΑΥΤΑ ΕΙΝΑΙ ΤΑ ΔΙΚΑΙΩΜΑΤΑ ΣΑΣ

ΚΑΝΕΙΣ ΔΕΝ ΔΥΝΑΤΕ ΝΑ ΤΑ ΣΤΕΡΗΣΕΙ.

Authorised by: Ecumenical Migrant Centre; Union of Unemployed;
Federation of Italian Workers and their Families;
Australiano-Greek Welfare.

HAKLARIMIZI İSTİYORUZ BAY KOPP

SİZİN GİBİ BİZLER DE MUNTAZAMAN MAASIMIZI ALMAK İSTİYORUZ.

BENEFİT ALAN BİZLER, YETERLİ VE TATMIN EDİCİ OLAMAYAN SOSYAL GÜVENLİK BAKANLIĞINI PROTESTO EDİYORUZ.

BİZLER, BAY KOPP'U GÖRMEK VE AŞAĞIDAKİ KONULARDA KONUŞMAK İSTİYORUZ.

1. ÇEKLERİN GECİKMESİNİN ÖNLENMESİ.
2. SERTİFİKALARIN DAHA İYİ MUHAFAZASI.
3. FEVKALADE DURUMLARDA İHTİYAÇ SAHIPLERİNE PEŞİN ÖDEME YAPILMASI.
4. GÖÇMENLER İÇİN TERCUMAN TEMİNİ.

SOSYAL GÜVENLİK HAKLARINI İSTİYEN HERKESİN, BU PROTESTOYA KATILMASI ÖNEMLİDİR.

BUNLAR SİZİN HAKLARINIZDIR.

BU HAKLARI SİZDEN KİMSE ALAMAZ.

NOI VOGLIAMO I NOSTRI DIRITTI MR. KOPP

Noi chiediamo i nostri pagamenti cosi' regolari come lei riceve i suoi.

Coloro di noi che ricevono benefici protestano contro l'insoddisfacente trattamento da parte del Dipartimento del Social Security.

Noi chiediamo di vedere Mr. Kopp per discutere di:

Avere gli assegni nel tempo stabilito.

Migliore cura e attenzione dei nostri documenti.

Soldi contanti per coloro con urgente bisogno.

Interpreti per emigranti.

E' importante che tutti coloro che vogliono i loro diritti e benefici, si uniscano a questa protesta.

QUESTI SONO I TUOI DIRITTI - Nessuno te li puo' negare.